SPECTATOR

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Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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THE SCREEN INDUSTRY CAN SERVE ITSELF BEST BY SERVING SCREEN ART MORE



From the



Editor's Easy Chair

CINCE I wrote a review of A Doctor's Diary, (page 9), in course of which I predicted the picture would cause controversy, I read in the Examiner that already doctors are beginning to protest and medical societies propose to take action to prevent its release. As the picture shows both ethical and racketeer doctors, it follows that only the racketeers in the profession have any grounds for complaint. The ethical, honest doctor should hail it with satisfaction as it exposes those who demean their profession by holding their earnings to be of greater importance than their curing. A doctor who is unaware the practice of medicine has been reduced to a racket level by many of those under oath to respect and preserve its ethics, is extraordinarily stupid. Ben Schulberg is doing both the medical profession and the public a valuable service in throwing a strong light on the dark places in medical circles. Some doctors take cruel advantage of the reliance and faith their patients are compelled to put in them. I have personal knowledge of instances of grossly unethical practices by doctors whose names stand high in their profession and who treat their patients only for the money there is in it. One instance: The doctor made a cursory examination of a woman patient; told her to have all her teeth extracted at once; gave her the card of the dentist he selected and told her what the dental bill would be. The doctor urged her to go to the dentist's office at once as her condition was grave.

HAT was thirteen years ago. I happened to be with the woman's husband when she telephoned him that she was in the dentist's office and was going to have all her teeth extracted. The husband told her to come home at once. To-day, the wife, all her teeth intact, is in perpect health. All that ever was the matter with her was a slight disposition to nervous headaches. No one with ordinary common sense would fail to grasp the fact of collusion between the doctor and the dentist for purposes of revenue only. Both of them are respected members of their profession, still practising in Hollywood. If either of them emits even a small squawk against Ben Schulberg's picture, I will supply Ben with his name and the name of the patient. At the same time, however, I would like to state that some of the finest, upright, honorable and honest citizens we have are to be found in the medical profession. My own doctor is one of the grandest men alive, a person it is a privilege to know, and

there are others like him. They will not object to A Doctor's Diary. It is not about them. It is about those who will object. The only distressing feature of the case is that the slightest suggestion of a protest will scare Will Hays so badly that he probably will line up with the protestants. Will has an extraordinary capacity for becoming frightened when anyone says "Boo!" to pictures. In this instance I hope he will have nerve enough to stand up for the industry he is paid so handsomely to serve. If he brought any courage to his movie job it should be in prime condition for use now. It has enjoyed a long, undisturbed sleep.

THE Era, London, in commenting on the difficulty English audiences have in understanding the idiomatic jargon of the gangsters appearing in American pictures, says: "Personally, we never can understand the lousy bums."

READING over again Gilbert Seldes's An Hour with the Movies and the Talkies, I came across a paragraph which supports my view of the screen's independence of the stage. Here it is: "For many years stage people used stage material for the movies; and not one single essential of the movies has ever been favorably affected by the stage; the stage has contributed nothing lasting to the movies. There isn't a single item of cinema technique which requires the experience of the stage; and every good thing in the movies has been accomplished either in profound indifference to the stage or against the experience of the stage." I do not quote Seldes to show what a bright fellow he is or what a bright fellow I am by virtue of sharing his views. No other conclusions could be arrived at by anyone with ordinary intelligence and an inclination to put the screen and stage side by side and regard their dissimilarity. Before the talkies were old enough to have a book written about them, in large letters on the front cover of a Spectator I announced, "The Stage Has Nothing to Offer the Screen," and inside the issue I set forth my views at length. I believe it was the first time such views were put in print anywhere, and they were expressed when Hollywood was in the first flurry of its rush to Broadway for plays to photograph and stage players to appear in them. Only the inherent strength of the screen as the world's foremost entertainment medium has enabled it to survive its contamination by the stage. Occasionally it has stag-

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NoCuts

gered under the weight of Hollywood's ignorance of its true nature, but it has muddled through in spite of the brutal treatment accorded it by film producers.

WARNER BROTHERS seem to function better when a year is young. In the SPECTATOR of January 18 last year I reviewed Petrified Forest and Captain Blood, two Warner pictures which were among the best released last year. In summing up the merits of the Hollywood product during the first six months of 1936, I awarded top honors to ten pictures. Half of them were made by Warners, the two mentioned above and Anthony Adverse, The Green Pastures and White Angel. Four of them were entrusted by Hal Wallis to Henry Blanke, associate producer, Harry Joe Brown having made Captain Blood. Now Henry Blanke starts off 1937 with The Green Light, reviewed in the last Spectator and which is among the best pictures ever made. Blanke it was, too, who gave us The Story of Louis Pasteur and Midsummer Night's Dream. For the first six months of this year he is to give us Danton, Zola, Dreyfuss, Beethoven, Robin Hood. The Wallis-Blanke team has an extraordinary record of achievement. No other such team in the world has to its credit, for the same period of time, such a list of outstanding successes as its last year's product, and I know of no other associate producer who has such an ambitious program ahead of him as that which Wallis has assigned to Blanke.

VOLUME of inestimable value for aspirants to A careers as writers of screen plays is Four-Star Scripts (Doubleday, Doran, \$2.50), Lorraine Noble, editor, which contains not only intelligent comments on screen writing, but, in addition, the complete shooting scripts of Lady for a Day, It Happened One Night, Little Women and The Story of Louis Pasteur. I cannot express my own opinion of its value in better terms than I find on the book's jacket, all of which I endorse: "Aside from its value to students of modern motion picture writing, this is a book which will be of great assistance to that growing legion of amateur movie makers who have tried, or contemplate trying, to write and produce their own screen plays. And the general reader will derive additional pleasure from his visits to the movies; he will know how the film has been made. Never before has anyone succeeded in obtaining the publishing rights to so imposing a list of film plays as are contained in Four-Star Scripts. Combined with these are the products of Miss Noble's natural ability to write, and the necessary technical knowledge to present the subject of scripts for the talkies interestingly and comprehensively. Miss Noble's experience was garnered in Hollywood, both as a film editor and a purchaser of material for the screen."

ANALYSIS of the result of Film Daily's poll of the film critics of the United States and Canada to determine the best pictures of 1936, reveals some interesting side-lights on the relative merits of the various producing organizations. Over five hundred critics voted and the results are set forth in the ten-best and the forty-four others, in order of the number of votes for each, which

constitute the "Honor Roll." As was to be expected, Metro's preponderance of star material gave it an edge on the other studios, as reflected in the appearance of four of its productions among the ten best and nine among the other forty-four. Warner Brothers, with but few outstanding stars to attract attention to their product, depending for votes, therefore, more largely on the intrinsic merit of their pictures, also has four among the first ten and five on the honor roll. The relative figures for United Artists are one and eight; Columbia, with comparatively few releases, one and two. With its many releases during the year, Twentieth Century managed to have only six productions mentioned among the fifty-four important ones; Paramount, with even more releases, has five; Universal, with comparatively few releases, three. In order of merit Century's first contestant is nineteenth on the list. Metro has eight higher on the list, Warners have six deemed by the critics to be better than Century's best; Universal two, and United Artists two. Five of those placed on the ballot I sent in are among the ten best, the other five coming in this order on the honor roll: 2nd, 7th, 12th, 20th, 32nd.

STRANGE, the threads of fate! Twenty some odd years ago, by the lottery of chance, a two-year old baby was rocketed into the heights of screen stardom. He was feted, petted, praised, and, in figures of that period, fabulously paid. Today his early Hollywood glory forgotten, he is still "in pictures" but how differently, you may judge for yourself. He was known in his stardom as "Little Billy". Keystone organized the "Little Billy Studio" for his films. Today he is the associate editor of the Spectator. His friends call him Bill. He is known as Paul Jacobs.

MENTAL HITHERS-AND-YONS: In 1909 Watty Rothacker was managing editor of Billboard, New York amusement weekly; the front cover of one issue was a photograph of me; I walked past all the Seattle news stands displaying it; thanked Watty for it at dinner at Beverly Brown Derby one evening last week. . . . When Mrs. Spectator's dog gets on my lap and looks at me intently with her big, wise, expressive black eyes, I regret exceedingly my inability to speak Pekinese. . . . A man I admire is the football player who can remain cool enough to kick straight when his team needs the extra point to win. . . . Only in retrospect should we enjoy a screen performance; while viewing a picture it should not come to us consciously that we are seeing an actor playing a part. ... I nominate for a Nobel prize, Robert Kreis, chef at the Beverly Brown Derby, for his creation of what appears on the menu as "Stuffed veal cutlet Orloff, glace, peas." A dish for the gods. . . . Four of us met in a doorway at El Capitan, A and his wife inbound, B and I, side by side, outbound. As all four of us paused, A introduced B to his wife, looked at me, then introduced me also without giving me a name. We had a pleasant chat. I had no idea who any of them were. I merely was trying to get outside for a smoke between acts. . . . I would like to see John Eldredge more frequently in the sympa-

thetic parts he plays so well. . . . Thirty-five years ago I reported international field trials for Forest and Stream, New York; watched the most famous setters from U. S. and Canadian kennels at work in the open, one of the most enjoyable jobs in my career as reporter. . . . Bobbie, intellectual, writer of books; P. H., her husband, successful business man, civic leader, phoned us they were at a Los Angeles hotel. We were delighted; hadn't seen them for years. Their first visit to Hollywood. Quick phoning to studios to arrange for their meeting stars on sets. Lunch at Brown Derby. No interest whatever in studios or stars; wanted to see only us. Bet Bobbie a pair of gloves that before she left town she would be in love with a movie actor. She laughed me to scorn. Took them out to Carl Spitz's place in San Fernando valley, introduced Buck, magnificent St. Bernard actor, to Bobbie; Carl directed Buck to act as if he were her dog. This morning the mailman brought me a nice pair of gloves.

FROM the Examiner gossip column: "Douglas Montgomery's many friends welcoming him after an absence of over a year at Helen Ferguson's cocktail party.' Hollywood is noted for guests who do not know when to go home, but when Doug stays at one party over a year -well, really, someone should speak to him about it. Someone also should suggest to Helen that she divide her parties into six months shifts to allow her to get some sleep. This marathon thing is pretty well played out, and, anyway, there are available few prospective guests sturdy enough to stick it out for over a year on a diet of nothing but cocktails and Hollywood conversation. The fact of Doug's having done it merely points to him as the exception that proves the rule; he should be given the prize for endurance and we should be permitted to forget the whole thing.

THE box-office value of a picture must be, in the long run, in ratio to its adherence to the fundamental principles of the art of which it is a unit. The basic appeal of a picture gets its strength from the degree in which it observes cinematic laws. Given any permissible theme and made in reasonable length, a picture which strictly obeys the laws must have general appeal. Not all, of course, would have the divine spark of greatness, but none would be an artistic failure, and with appropriate themes and care exercised in applying to them the laws of the art, there should be no financial failures.

CLASS B pictures form the bulk of the output of major studios, but they do not receive the consideration their commercial importance demands. Under the block-booking system their producers are assured a profit on them before they are released and exhibitors have to carry the burden of their lack of box-office draw. Some day a wise producer is going to realize the potentialities of his class B pictures, put the best brains in his organization on them and steal a march on his competitors. It may be a long grind, but eventually he will make his trademark mean so much to the public that he will not have to rely on big names as a box-office asset. The public buys automobiles on the strength of their makers' names. There is

no fundamental difference between marketing automobiles and marketing motion pictures. "An Atlas Picture" can be made to mean as much on a theatre marquee as "A General Motors Car" means in an automobile advertisement. For all the scores of millions of dollars it has spent on exploitation throughout the years, the name Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has less box-office value than that of Robert Taylor. A Taylor picture gets its importance from Bob's name. If the film industry conducted its affairs on sound business principles, Bob would be important because of his appearance in a Metro picture, and the picture, not Bob, would be the thing of box-office value.

ONE bit of evidence indicating increased interest throughout the country in the study of the screen is the constant demand for my book, Know Your Movies. It is out of print. After the first edition was printed the plates were destroyed. I was disappointed with it in spite of the generous things said about it by book reviewers. The editions sold out, more because of the lack of such books than by virtue of the merits of mine. As soon as I can find the time, I will make an effort to write another which will more nearly satisfy me. In the meantime this paragraph will serve as notice that there are no more copies of Know Your Movies available.

UNIVERSAL is said to be preparing a story with an operatic background for Deanna Durbin's second picture. I suppose it is inevitable—the child can sing, therefore she must be presented as a singer in a grand opera atmosphere, even though no grand opera presents one of its characters as a singer. The strength of Adele Comandini's story, Three Smart Girls, Deanna's current success, lies in her characterization as merely a child who is taking singing lessons. That is as far toward grand opera as a picture should go. But it should go in the other direction—it should present singers without mentioning their singing. To give Deanna Durbin an opera house background is a mistake.

WHEN Billy and Bobby Mauck, identical twins, appear in The Prince and the Pauper, it will be the first time in the history of the stage or the screen, as far as I am able to discover, that twins played together in parts calling for a perfect resemblance.

THIS from the Motion Picture Herald: "Official word came this week from the WPA of an expected drastic reduction in the federal theatre project, which has been taking some 425,000 potential customers away from film theatres every week—a potential loss of \$2,420,000 to motion picture box-offices." Motion pictures themselves are responsible for the loss of their 425,000 customers; the federal theatre project did not take them away from picture houses. It merely caught them when pictures failed to hold them. Instead of viewing with satisfaction the elimination of competition, the film industry should welcome it and make its product entertaining enough to hold its audience in spite of all counter attractions.

Writing Reviews with Many Interruptions

Drama and a Toggle Bolt

SHE'S DANGEROUS, Universal picture. Directed by Lewis R. Foster and Milton Carruth; associate producer, E. M. Asher; original story by Murray Roth and Ben Ryan; screen play, Lionel Houser and Albert R. Perkins; photographer, Milton Krasner, A.S.C.; art direction, Jack Otterson; associate director, Loren Pattrick; film editor, Frank Gross; musical director, Lou Forbes; special effects, John P. Fulton; sound supervisor, Homer G. Tasker. Cast: Tala Birell, Walter Pidgeon, Cesar Romero, Walter Brennan, Warren Hymer, Samuel S. Hinds, Jonathon Hale, Richard Carle, Franklyn Pangborn, Richard Tucker, June Brewster, Stanley Andrews.

UT of Universal City comes another good one, a Ocrime-and-punishment drama with no outstanding box-office names in its cast, but with far more merit than usually is found in ambitious star offerings. To me the most arresting feature of She's Dangerous is the performance of Tala Birell. If I ever saw her before, it must have been in some role which gave her personality and ability little opportunity to register. Whatever it is that Greta Garbo has, Tala Birell has also-some inner quality that makes her distinctive, a suggestion of power, a sense of drama, of latent emotional resources which give us the impression she still has much in reserve even when she plays her most dramatic scenes. We see her first when she enters a night club. There are perhaps a dozen others in the scene, and although she does nothing to attract attention to herself, her personality is so strong the audience will feel instinctively she is to play the leading part.

(I might as well confess here that I am writing this review under great difficulties. Mrs. Spectator, the dogs and I only this morning moved into our new San Fernando Valley home. After much searching I found my writing pad in a bucket on the back porch and my fountain pen in the pocket of an old smoking jacket I have not worn for years. Digging down through bedding and drapes and being severely scolded for the mess I made, I came to my easy chair and settled myself for action, only to discover there was no ink in my pen. I remembered packing the ink, but where? Well, you have moved and you know how it is. In looking for it I came across my library hangings and thought I might as well hang them. Under the last one I found a box in which the ink bottle was keeping company with a lot of laundry supplies. I know I did not put it there, but, anyway, I filled my pen, dug my chair again out of a lot of things I had piled on it in looking for the ink, set to work, wrote the opening paragraph; then the men brought the ice-box. Quite a sight—a giant's jewel case, severe, dignified, chaste. I watched the ceremony of installation, am back in my chair and trying to recall my reactions to the Universal picture I saw last night. Heigh ho!)

THE motivation of the story lies in the murder of Jonathan Hale by Cesar Romero, and the latter's fastening of the crime on Tala Birell. It is sound story construction in that the audience knows all the circumstances and

only to the law authorities is the solution of the crime shrouded in mystery. By good writing and expert direction, suspense is maintained throughout, reaching a tense climax in the closing sequence. The story ends sharply on Tala's dramatic last-minute reprieve which comes after she has entered the death chamber.

(Excuse me for a moment. As I glance out the window I see that Bo Peep, Mrs. Spectator's Pekinese, and Arthur, my spaniel, are on the back lawn, having a tug-of-war with what looks to me from this distance like a pair of my suspenders. . . . It was. I gave them an old sweater. When they finish with it I will go out and rake it up.)

Cesar Romero and Walter Pidgeon play the two leading roles. Romero's characterization of the master criminal is forceful and chilling, a really brilliant performance. Pidgeon, always the gracious, handsome, plausible actor, has a part which is tailored to his measure. Walter Brennan gives us another of his skilfully etched characterizations, and Warren Hymer—

(A bakery wagon merchant just then lured me down the driveway to his supply of eatables. I bought some baked beans, a pie and some flat-looking things. When I deposited them on the kitchen sink I could not recall what the salesman had told me the flat-looking things were made of, so we don't know when to eat them. Oh, well, there are Arthur and Bo Peep.)

WARREN HYMER plays his usual dumb role. I believe for the sake of his own career and that of the pictures in which he appears, he should be permitted to play something else. Typing players is fundamentally unsound. When we first see a character on the screen we should not know what kind of part he is to play. Characterizations should be developed by the picture in which the player is appearing at the moment, not by all those in which he has appeared previously. Hollywood carries typing to such an extent that a list of the players appearing in a picture almost is a synopsis of the story the picture is to tell. I have in mind El Brendel. A long time ago he gave an excellent characterization of a Swedish dialect comedian. He was good in the part, not because he is a Swede-which he is not-but becauuse he is an excellent actor. His first success sealed his doom. It seems strange to me that we have no producer with brains enough to grasp the fact that El Brendel in an entirely different part would be a novelty which would enhance the entertainment quality of a picture. One could make a list of scores of other players to whom the same thing applies.

I am aware that this review is somewhat rambling, but there is so much going around me that I find it difficult to keep my mind on the main job. During the present temporary lull we will get back to She's Dangerous. There are several interesting points it suggests. It has its good and bad points, the good predominating to

make it engrossing entertainment worth the seeing if you can enjoy another screen story about robbery and murder. The production is adequate, the settings reflecting the progress Jack Otterson is making toward recognition as an outstanding art director.

SEVERAL years ago it was when I first expressed my views on the manner in which, under some circumstances, singing voices should be presented on the screen. What I meant is demonstrated in She's Dangerous. Walter Pidegon is presented as a doctor, not as a singer. In one of the few spots in the picture suggesting a domestic atmosphere—

(At that juncture two men came to install the telephone. They disturbed me because I wanted the phone placed on a small gate-leg table beside my easy chair, as I am lazy and object to going elsewhere to use it. I learned one of the men was named Arthur because he answered when I called my dog. He called the other Bob, so for the past hour I have Arthur and Bob on my hands. Anyway, I could not proceed with my writing when they had to work where my chair sets, so I sort of superintended the job. For the first time in my life I met a toggle bolt. When you wish to affix anything to a plaster wall and can not find wood behind the plaster where you want to fasten the thing, you are out of luck if you have no doodle bug-I mean, toggle bolt. It has two folding steel prongs which, when folded close to the bolt, go through the hole you drill through the plaster, and spring open when it gets inside, finally gripping the plaster tightly when the bolt is screwed in all the way. Quite a gadget. Now I am back in my chair, my phone at my elbow —but where was I?)

MY stopping point was domestic atmosphere. Walter sits at the piano and begins to strum. Tala asks him to sing a certain song again, thus, incidentally, registering that there had been other such domestic scenes. Walter sings in that rich baritone voice we hear far too infrequently from the screen. That he is just a doctor singing, not a vocal artist performing, is suggested by Tala's action in wandering from the room to the porch, and Walter's action in ceasing his singing and following her. This treatment is cinematically sound in that the interpolated song is not allowed to check the forward progress of the story, is not allowed to give us as much of Walter's voice as we would wish for. This makes the scene authentic by creating the impression that we are looking at an occurrence in real life and not at something staged for our entertainment.

On the debit side we have a few scenes in which the dialogue is not directed properly, the fault being emphasized by the general excellence of all the rest of the direction, the joint work of Lewis Foster and Milton Carruth being most creditable. After killing Hale, Romero goes to the Newark Airport and there in a loud voices discusses with Hymer their chances of eluding the police. In Pidgeon's mountain cabin, Romero does not lower his voice when talking with Tala about Pidgeon,

even though Pidgeon is in the next room and dire consequences would result if Romero were overheard.

As I have said in these columns many times before, all the drama latent in the plotting of two criminals is not brought out if the tone of their voices suggests they are indifferent to the possibility of their being overheard. None of the scenes of which I complain develops half its dramatic possibilities. Loud talking, as such—

(I had forgotten about Bob and Arthur, the phone man, not the dog. Arthur came in just then to test the phone and while he waited for something to be done at the other end, we had a smoke and a chat. The little tin box which the toggle bolt holds onto the side of the house has wires running from it to a steel rod driven into the ground. In case an electric company's wire comes in contact with a telephone wire, the current of electricity is carried into the ground instead of putting your phone out of business. The toggle-bolted wire also serves as a lighting rod and will protect your house if the bolt of lightning hits near it. It is not there for that purpose, but will do the work if it is in the line of attack, the telephone company giving no free long distance service in the way of lightning protection. After Arthur left, I was settling down to work again when Mrs. Spectator came into the library with a hat in her hand and told me she wished I would get into the habit of hanging up my things. It is so long since I wore a hat that I could not recall having worn the one she had, but I tossed it onto a high shelf in a closet, and then Bob bobbed in and asked if we had seen his hat. Our collapsible step-ladder finally was found prostrate under a pile of bedding, set up and the hat retrieved from the closet shelf. I asked Bob if it were his, and he said it was and he left after thanking us and giving me a toggle bolt. I believe Arthur and Bob have gone permanently.)

LOUD talking, as such, never is objectionable in scenes which demand it. Scenes in which lines which should be read in low tones, are spoken loudly, do not irritate an audience by virtue of the excess volume of noise. They offend because the loudness is not consistent with what should be the moods of the scenes. The yolk of a boiled egg, for instance, is really a beautiful thing of rich golden color, but on a man's vest it is disgusting.

There is another incident in She's Dangerous that prompts worthwhile discussion. Tala Birell goes to the apartment of Jonathan Hale to report that she has worked her way into the confidence of Romero, who is suspected of having engineered the theft of valuable bonds. Hale opens the door to her, escorts her through a room to one beyond, and there they confer. Romero picks up her trail, and finally comes along a corridor to the door in which the conference is taking place; he stands before the closed door and overhears what is said inside the room. Here we have a violation of one of the fundamental rules of all arts—that no art creation should prompt a question it does not answer. Why did Tala go from the corridor to a room beyond the one she first en-

tered, if the purpose was to place her where Romero could overhear her? Why-

(Why am I interrupted constantly? Why should I be held responsible for the disappearance of the box with the shower curtains and bath mats in it? I distinctly remember putting it under the bed in the front bedroom and if it isn't there now it's not my fault. That box? Oh, that's one with something light in it that I have been standing on to hang my pictures. All right, go ahead and open it. I'll never get the SPECTATOR written at this rate. So the bath things were in the box, were they? How was I supposed to know that? I tell you I put it under the bed in the front room.)

WHY—well, why what? What question did I have in mind? Let us start again. How did Romero know where to go? There is nothing in the picture to indicate he had previous knowledge of Hale's apartment. And why all the movement involved in taking Tala through one room to another when it would be inevitable that the audience would ask how Romero found the right door at which to listen? The listening, too, suggests another fundamental point that applies to all screen creations. Romero is shown, in semi close-up, standing outside the door listening to what is said within.

The camera is the eye of the audience; the microphone is the ear of the audience. The audience always is as near the player as the camera is when the scene is shot. When we see a big close-up of a player, following a long shot in which he is but one small figure, we do not get the impression that he has increased in size, but merely the feeling that we have moved closer to him. Thus the camera moves us into and out of scenes. When Romero

stands-

(Excuse me. . . . I agreed with the man at the door that the hedge needed trimming, and I told him to trim it. We walked all over the garden, and he certainly knows things about flowers and shrubs. I left him starting to put everything in shape after telling his small daughter, who was with him, to hurry home and tell her mother he had a job. The little girl's name is Maggie.)

WHEN Romero stands outside the door, the audience is standing so close to him that it must hear anything he hears, even though not quite so distinctly. But the audience does not hear a word spoken within the room; does not imagine Romero is hearing anything, but when he enters the room it is revealed that he had overheard the confidences exchanged in ordinary conversational tones by Tala and Hale. He shoots Hale and to incriminate Tala, leaves a photograph of her on the floor besides the corpse. At the subsequent trial of the two for murder, the photograph is accepted as proof of Tala's guilt, and the fact that the fatal bullet was fired from Romero's gun condemns him. How a jury could conclude that the girl was foolish enough to engage in a murder and leave her photograph beside the victim, is something else an audience would question.

(I give up. Since writing the above, Arthur, the spaniel, and I went back to where we came from in an

effort to solve the mystery of the disappearance of the pink blanket. We were unsuccessful. I was unaware that we ever had possessed a pink blanket, and, in any event, there seems to be so many heaps of bedding on the floor now that the loss or addition of one blanket would be a matter of no importance, although I confess a pink one would add a touch of gaiety to the heap I can see outside my door. I have troubles of my own now. I can't find the screwdriver. I discovered its disappearance after I had returned from a fruitless search for Arthur. No one had seen him since we got back from the trip in search of the blanket. If you have lost a dog you know how distressing the feeling is. All of us were heartbroken at the thought of the poor little fellow vainly trying to find his way back to his new home in a locale strange to him. I walked all over the neighborhood, calling his name. One woman who heard me asked me what my little boy looked like. I caught only part of her question and when I told her he was red and white and had long ears, she looked at me in a funny sort of way. It was then I recalled that she had said something about a little boy. After eating a sandwich in the kitchen I assured Mrs. Spectator that Arthur would turn up all right, that I would drive all over the valley until I found him. I went out to the car and found him asleep on the back seat; and now, if I only could find the screwdriver. My toggle bolt is quite useless without the cooperation of a screwdriver.)

A Lesson from Overseas

CARNIVAL IN FLANDERS. Produced by the Films Sonores Tobis; from the story by Charles Spaak; screen play by Bernard Zimmer; directed by Jacques Feyder; presented at the Four Star Theatre. Cast: Francoise Rosay, Alerme, Jean Murat, Micheline Cheirel, Bernard Lancret, Alfred Adam.

WHEN we provincial Hollywood people wish to say anything complimentary about a picture made abroad, we remark, "In some respects it is fully up to the Hollywood standard." If France sends us many more trivial comedies told as wittily and mounted as handsomely as Carnival in Flanders, perhaps some day we can boast that one of ours "in some respects is fully up to the French standard." Over here we grade our productions according to the literary magnitude of the stories. It never would occur to us to hang royal trappings on a bedroom farce. It would cost too much money. The French producers made the Flanders story important by the simple means of giving it an important production, by telling an old story in glamorous pictorial language, casting it perfectly and giving it expert direction so nicely shaded that immorality becomes amusing and bad taste is refined by a cleansing sense of humor.

If the insane people who rule the destinies of European countries do not plunge the continent into another general war, the development of picture making over there will become a real threat to the world dominance of the American film industry. Prior to the outbreak of the World War in 1914, Europe was making vast strides in improving the quality of its screen entertainment. The best pictures shown in this country were those which came to us from European studios, Italy, especially, sending us several imposing productions as good for their day as anything Hollywood has made since. At that time our productions were pale imitations of what Europe sent us.

The European threat was dissipated and while the guns roared over there, the American film industry gained the world film market so completely that Europe thus far has been able to regain only a little of its lost ground. But it is not licked. With a fundamentally sound artistic sense developed by centuries of cultivation, with limitless possibilities in the way of scenic backgrounds to bring the old world to the new, and, above all, without the reverence we in this country have for the money god, Europe is in a strong position to make it difficult for Hollywood to retain its leadership.

A business which derives its revenue from the sale of the creations of an art but considers its revenue as of more importance than the art, can not meet the competition of an industry which has the reverse sense of values. Hollywood's greatest weakness is its refusal to recognize screen entertainment as a member of the family of arts. Those who dominate our film industry regard pictures solely as articles of commerce upon which they have a virtual corner, and with which they can become rich by paying themselves preposterous salaries and voting themselves equally preposterous bonuses out of moneys belonging to the stockholders of their companies. Over in Europe the existence of an art of the cinema was recognized more than a quarter of a century ago, and the present growing activity in picture production is based upon it.

ANOTHER factor in the advantage Europe has over us is its patience. It is not in a hurry. To show it how, by investing a dollar in pictures now, it can earn dividends twenty years hence to justify the investment, is all the Old World asks. Hollywood will invest a dollar now only if assured of dividends tomorrow. Mussolini is determined to make Italy the motion picture center of the world. He thinks in terms of decades, not of days. Prove to him that he can not attain his objective in his lifetime, and he will go ahead without pause. After him will be Italy still, and it is Italy, not himself, that matters.

(Of course, you are wondering what all this has to do with a review of Carnival in Flanders. I am wondering myself. I seem to have become lost. The library hang ings which I put up yesterday, as related in the preceding review, were all wrong and as I was nicely under way with Flanders, a drapery man came in and did everything over again, and there was I, in my easy chair in the corner, trying to ignore his presence and go ahead as if the company of a tall, baldheaded, taciturn man with hairy arms and an extraordinarily long screwdriver, were a standard aid to literary concentration. As I read back, I conclude I must have forgotten what I was writing about and veered off on a tour of Europe, but just where I left the main trail I have not been able to determine. The thing seems rather connected, to my way of thinking, but I concede it is a rather queer review of a picture.)

Anyway, we are in Italy, even though we do not know how we got there. Silvano Balboni, well known here and now on the staff of the Italian Director General of Cinematography, writes me about activities over there, one of his comments being: "The thing that's sure is that quite good films are now made in Italy and undoubtedly much better productions will come out of this country in the near future when the new studios will be completed. They are due to operate in April."

A nation already with some notable films to its credit, with the energy and ability of Il Duce behind it, which deems motion pictures important enough to be sponsored by the national government, whose history largely is a record of development of the fine arts—there is a nation that will offer stiff competition to any other trying to outdo it in producing screen entertainment. Flanders is only an intimation of what we may expect from France, which previously has sent us other worthy films. Middle Europe, whence came Ecstasy, the only motion picture with audible dialogue that I have seen in years, may be expected eventually to invade the American market and thereafter to figure largely in it.

One advantage the scattered film industry of Europe has over our concentrated American set-up, is that abroad the picture money is put on the screen and not so much of it goes for player and executive salaries. Another advantage Europe has—the one which eventually will count most—is that across the Atlantic they recognize there is such a thing as an art of the screen and allow consideration of it to influence production. Their theory is that no one appearing in a picture can be as important as the picture itself. Over here we have the reverse theory: There is no art, money is king and a star is a god.

P.ERHAPS, before I conclude this review of Carnival in Flanders, it might be as well if I reviewed it. I believe in the old-fashioned school of thought which holds the view that the thing criticized should be referred to occasionally in a criticism of it. Of course, I could express here some constructive thoughts which occurred to me as I listened to the broadcast of the President's message to Congress; I could discuss the economic effect on the United States of another general war in Europe, and make a rather shrewd guess as to the outcome of the Perry-Vines series of tennis matches—even perhaps suggest a wise investment in chances on the Santa Anita Handicap—but I think it would be better if I stuck to my main job and wrote my review of the French picture. It is one you should see. There, thank heaven, is another job completed.

(Lucky I finished my review just then. As I penned the last words, Florence and Parker, young friends of ours, dropped in to see our new home. Florence brought some fascinating dish towels and Parker brought a duck. There is something about the starboard-to-port waddle of a duck and his general air of philosophical concentration, which always has appealed to me, enlisting my interest as no dish towel yet has succeeded in doing. Mrs. Spectator put away the towels—they are too nice to wipe dishes with—and christened the duck "Alexander." She always has had an ambition to own a pet called Alexander. I was too exhausted after concentrating on my review of Flanders to raise the question as to whose property the duck is, but when the gift-bearers departed I car-

ried Alexander out to the back lawn and made acquaintance overtures to him as he waddled around evaluating
the advantages of his new home. I now am in the market
for a tutor who will teach me how to groom and feed a
duck. I know he likes water, so I dug a hole in the lawn,
sunk a wash-tub in it, and am exhausted again. Luckily
I had laid in a stock of chopped grain to lure birds to
our place; I gave Alexander a dish of it, and left him
scooping up, not at all daintily, great quantities of it.
Just a moment, please—the telephone. . . . The young
people again. The duck's name is Alexandra. As I look
out the window I see Arthur and Bo Peep trying to edge
close enough to smell her.)

It Strikes a New Note

THE GODS AT PLAY (Amphitryon). Production, Gunther Stapenhorst. Released in France by Alliance Cinematographique Europenee. Scenario and direction, Reinhold Schunzel and Albert Valentin; music, Francois Doelle; dialogue and songs, Serge Veber; supervision, Raoul Ploquin. Cast: Henry Garat, Armand Bernad, Jeanne Boitel, Odette Florelle, Marguerite Moreno.

OLYMPUS and Juno, his shrewish wife, do not look so good to Jupiter when he looks down on ancient Thebes and sees a beautiful woman, so he and Mercury take a parachute drop to Earth and play the devil with the tranquility of the Thebean home of Amphitryon and his wife, Alcmene. There you have another trivial story which has been done into screen entertainment by brilliant French screen artists. If you miss The Gods at Play, now running at the Grand International, you will be doing yourself a grave injustice. If your interest be in pictures, you can learn more from this one than from any other talkie ever made in this country or coming to us from abroad. It is not solely a lesson in picture making. It is excellent entertainment. When Jupiter scans the world below, Mercury says there is no use looking at America as it will not be discovered for four thousand years yet, and from there to the end the production strikes a joyous note.

The dialogue is in French and is translated in several times the number of superimposed titles we generally see in foreign-tongue pictures. This makes it easy to follow the story. A magnificent mounting is given it, scenes of Thebes being on a grand scale, and great crowds of extras keep the screen alive. The performances are flawless, the players preserving admirably the mood the story establishes in the first sequence. Direction is as good as any we have over here; the screen play is a fine piece of screen writing.

AND all the merits I have pointed out sink into insignificance when compared with the musical treatment given the production. It has what without question is the finest score ever written for a photoplay, one which opens a new vista of the part music can play in a screen creation. Dialogue and music are synchronized so perfectly that in the majority of scenes, each word spoken falls on a down beat of music; thus speeches are given a lilting quality that will fascinate an audience. I do not know how the score would sound if played apart from its scenic accompaniment, nor am I aware how much merit it has as music; I

am aware only that it is a perfect contribution to the sum total of perfection the production attains.

Staccato dialogue and sustained speeches alike are given the same musical treatment, except that in places the longer speeches are sung. The wedding of words and music is so complete, the singing is absorbed evenly and naturally into the forward flow of the story until we are unaware of anything illogical in a group of people carrying on a conversation in song. It is grand opera made intimate, except that in grand opera the music is of most importance and in this picture the dialogue is the element of primary interest, the music being an unobtrusive background. Gods at Play should have an influence on both the screen and grand opera; on the screen principally, of course, because it displays a greater appreciation of the proper place of music in pictures than any of our Hollywood score composers have been permitted to display. We have great musicians here, but they are not allowed to write great picture scores as producers lack the patience it would require to secure the proper synchronization of score and films.

Ben Schulberg's Good One

A DOCTOR'S DIARY, Paramount release of B. P. Schulberg production. Features George Bancroft, Helen Burgess, John Trent, Ruth Coleman and Ra Hould. Directed by Charles Vidor; screen play by David Boehm; story by Samuel Ornitz and Joseph Anthony; photographed by Harry Fischbeck; art direction, Albert D'Agostino; musical direction, Boris Morros; film editor, Richard C. Currier; assistant director, Ray Lissner. Supporting cast: Molly Lamont, Sidney Blackmer, Charles D. Waldron, Frank Puglia, Milburn Stone, Sue Carol. Running time, 75 minutes.

ONE of my opinions which Rob Wagner, in his Script, accuses me of "riding to death," by my persistence is that the screen is not an acting art, that it is not an art of projecting emotions by the voice; that it is one of using the camera to draw the audience near enough to the players to hear their whispers and see their emotions expressed in their eyes. If my theory be right, and I claim it is based on the necessity of obedience to the laws of screen art if its creations are to achieve the ultimate in artistic and commercial success—if I be right, the stage can not serve as a satisfactory recruiting ground for screen talent. After seeing A Doctor's Diary, I can point to one straw which shows I have been blowing in the right direction.

We read almost every day of some studio official flying to New York in search of new picture talent, even though on his way to the airport he has to drive carefully to avoid running over talent already here. I am not aware what Ben Schulberg was looking for when he made the trip, but he came back with an aviator whom he presents as leading man is A Doctor's Diary. John Trent has everything the screen needs. Stalwart, handsome, an engaging personality, a good voice, an aptitude for being the person he plays, the impression he makes in his first picture is completely satisfactory, his easy, finished performance making it safe to predict for him a highly successful screen career. Unfortunately his first appearance is marred by something he will have to live down-a totally unnecessary drunken scene which takes him completely out of character and is not consistent with the mood of the story. It loses for him the respect his earnestness and devotion

to his medical duties has earned, and suggests he is, after all, weak enough to get drunk again as soon as he can find the time. Never have I seen in any picture a more gratuitous undermining of a carefully developed characterization.

THE production is bound to provoke controversy, with the medical profession as the protestant. Vividly it portrays how completely the public is at the mercy of those upon whom it must depend for the curing of its physical ills, and openly charges that at least some doctors have more regard for the ethics of their profession than for the lives of those whose fees support it. Sue Carol, who plays a small bit with dramatic impressiveness, dies on the operating table because no other doctor will take the place of the one whose patient she is and who is delayed in his arrival at the hospital. That is the first indictment of the medical profession. Several others follow.

Another instance of professional neglect eventuates in a suit for damages against the offending doctor. The trial scene is directed admirably by Charles Vidor and acted splendidly by all those who appear in it, but it is here that the story begins to wabble and leave us up in the air. The hero stultifies himself by compromising with his conscience in giving his testimony, is shot in the shoulder by the plaintiff, and we are not informed as to the result of the trial or what happened to the shooter. But the important thing about A Doctor's Diary is that it is a picture well worth seeing. Ben Schulberg has given it a production which in itself will engage your close attention. It fairly reeks of ether, a great deal of the action taking place in operating rooms. Owing to Vidor's skilful direction we get the impression of technical authenticity in the depiction of hospital routine. That is a valuable element of direction—sincerity which in itself make us accept, as being done accurately, things we never before have seen done and of which we know nothing. Vidor did his job really brilliantly and it should earn him other important assignments.

George Bancroft gives an excellent performance, as does Helen Burgess, an appealing and talented young woman. A boy, Ra Hauld, proves himself a born actor. His mother is played feelingly by Molly Lamont. Sidney Blackmer, always one of the screen's most dependable players, gives another of the thoughtful, convincing performances we can expect when we see his name in a cast. Harry Fischbeck's photography is of the best.

Lloyd and Estabrook

MAID OF SALEM, Paramount. Producer, Howard Estabrook; director, Frank Lloyd; original, Bradley King; screen play, Walter Ferris, Bradley King and Durwood Grinstead; photographer, Leo Tover; musical director, Boris Morros; original music, Victor Young; art directors, Hans Dreier and Bernard Herzbrun; costumes, Travis Banton; assistant director, William Tummel. Cast: Claudette Colbert, Fred MacMurray, Harvey Stephens, Gale Sondergaard, Louise Dresser, Bennie Bartlett, Edward Ellis, Beulah Bondi, Bonita Granville, Virginia Weidler, Donald Meek, E. E. Clive, Halliwell Hobbes, Pedro de Cordoba, Madame Sul-te-wan, Lucy Beaumont, Henry Kolker, William Farnum, Ivan Simpson, Brandon Hurst, Sterling Holloway, Zeffie Tilbury, Babs Nelson, Mary Treen, J. Farrell MacDonald, Stanley Fields, Lionel Belmore, Guy Bates Post.

AN exceedingly well done job. Regarded solely as a specimen of the work Hollywood turns out, Maid of Salem must rank high among the most meritorious productions of any season. Howard Estabrook has given it a setting authentic as to detail in interiors and costuming and which brings to the screen the actual locale in which the story is laid. To its credit also is the fact that the story itself is strictly accurate history. Extreme care was taken and considerable expense incurred in exhaustive research to establish as a fact of history every incident shown on the screen which had a direct bearing on the theme of the story. Frank Lloyd, with many notable pictures to his credit, never has given us a more finished bit of direction. In all phases of the story he is equally at home, from the playfulness of children to the stark horror of the tree on Gallows Hill. And from the members of his distinguished cast he derives evenly excellent performances.

So if screen craftsmanship in itself has box-office value, Maid of Salem is destined to enjoy a successful box-office career. If honest presentation of the facts recorded on one of the darkest pages of United States history lacks elements of popularity as screen entertainment, then the picture may not do so well. With impressive grimness it takes us back to Salem Village when that speck of New England was convulsed with the insanity of its belief in witchcraft, an obsession born of such passionate ignorance, distorted beliefs in the supernatural and unbridled bloodlust that eighteen of its people were hanged on Gallows Hill, with the men, women and children of the village as witnesses of the ghastly spectacles.

HE picture softens history by its refusal to carry the audience to the foot of the gallows, building its tragedy more by what it implies than by what it shows; yet the tragedy of the almost unbelievable ignorance and viciousness of some of the early New England settlers loses none of its strength by such treatment. And the story has application to conditions existing today. That is the excuse for making a photoplay of a page which has been turned and which could profit us little if in its turning back it did not teach us the folly of blind superstition, of ignorance rampant and the danger of misdirected mob psychology. For this lesson which the photoplay teaches we are indebted to Frank Lloyd for the selection of the story material and the graphically impressive manner in which he presents it to us.

An alieviating element in the general drabness of the story is the pleasant background against which it is told. Paramount sent its technical experts to the actual scenes in which the tragedies of a belief in witchcraft were enacted. Thus by the magic of the motion picture camera early New England is recreated authentically for us. Leo Tover's photography is one of the picture's assets. The same meticulous attention to detail exercised by Bradley King, writer of the highly creditable story, was displayed in the architecture of the sets and their decoration. From a pictorial standpoint alone Maid of Salem is a notable production.

HE acting honors go to Claudette Colbert. She has many excellent performances to her credit, but at the

moment I can remember no other which matches this one for its brilliant display of emotional lights and shades. At all times she has her scenes completely under her command, the combination of her intelligence and technical proficiency giving her performance power and appeal that will raise her still higher in the estimation of her admirers. And in no picture has she looked lovelier, being an entrancing figure in the severe costumes women wore in the period of her production. If you have not done it before, watch Claudette's hands when you see Maid of Salem. They are a picture in themselves.

Fred MacMurray takes another long step in the spectacular progress he is making toward recognition as one of our outstanding leading men. He was given a characterization the picture needed, a devil-may-care, gallant, joyous youth, madly in love with Claudette and ready to fight the whole world if in so doing he could be of service to her. The romance of the two is directed admirably. To millions of people who still hold pleasant memories of her, the presence of Louise Dresser in the cast will be a factor in making the picture agreeable. Always a superb actress, the folly of producers in overlooking her is one of those bewildering stupidities in high places which make Hollywood so engrossingly misunderstandable. There are many other performances in the picture entitled to individual mention, but I never yet have been able to write a long list of such mentions and make them interesting reading.

Too Drab to Entertain

YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE, United Artists release of Walter Wanger production. Directed by Fritz Lang. Co-stars Sylvia Sidney and Henry Fonda. Original and screen play by Gene Towne and Graham Baker; photographed by Leon Shamroy; art director, Alexander Toluboff; musical direction, Alfred Newman; music and lyrics by Louis Alter and Paul Webster; film editor, Daniel Mandell; assistant director, Robert Lee. Supporting cast: Barton MacLane, Jean Dixon, William Gargan, Jerome Cowan, Chic Sale, Margaret Hamilton, Warren Hymer, Guinn Williams, John Wray, Walter De Palma, Jonathan Hale, Ward Bond, Wade Boteler, Henry Taylor, Jean Stoddard, Ben Hall. Running time, 87 minutes.

HANDSOMELY mounted, gorgeously photographed, superbly directed, brilliantly acted, You Only Line superbly directed, brilliantly acted, You Only Live Once is a technical triumph for Walter Wanger. No more artistically conceived and competently executed production has come to the screen in a long time. The story, however, lacks elements of popularity. It is drab, morbid; a thing of criminal courts, robbery, murder, penitentiaries, a death cell; its hero a young man who graduated from the reformatory to serve three terms in major prisons, its heroine a young woman who at the end deserts her baby to flee with her murderer husband, and the husband is low enough to permit her to do it. Both of them are shot down by the law, and the picture fades out on the spirit of the victim of the hero's murderous bullet informing the two that the gates of Heaven are open to them.

In a cumbersome sort of way, Gene Towne and Graham Baker labor to make their screen play a preachment on behalf of criminals who have served their terms, a give-them-another-chance plea which lacks conviction by virtue of the leading character's long criminal record making it hard to believe in his reformation. The

elements of the story are developed illogically. Henry Fonda, who plays the lead, is given a job when his third term expires, and is discharged, not because he is a former convict, but because he loiters with his employer's truck and throws the delivery system off schedule. And the employer is not characterized as an average citizen, which he would have to be to give strength to the persecution theme. He screams into the telephone, and is otherwise so abnormal it suggests the thought that Fonda merely was the victim of fate in having been employed by the wrong kind of individual.

By the simple expedient of making the employer an average business man who explains quietly his objection to having a former convict in his service, the persecution factor could have been established and some degree of sympathy created for the employe. Fonda later is convicted of murder committed in course of a robbery, the only evidence against him being the finding of his hat at the scene of the crime, a determining influence in his conviction, of course, being his previous record. If Fonda committed the crime, what happened to the truck which figured in it? That question and others as pertinent could have been raised by defense counsel to have secured at least a hung jury. American juries do not send a man to his death merely because he had been in prison.

That our hero is a murderer at heart, however, is established when he kills the prison chaplain as the latter comes to tell Fonda that his innocence has been established. This sequence is morbidly maudlin. Fonda is fighting his way out of prison and regards the announcement of his innocence as a trick to make him surrender. He escapes, joins Sylvia Sidney, his wife; they flee in Barton MacLane's car; a baby is born to Sylvia in a barn, apparently without medical assistance and without checking the flight more than momentarily, for it is a newly born baby we see when the flight is resumed. The baby is taken to Jean Dixon, Sylvia's sister, and Fonda and Sylvia set forth again, only to meet the bullets of the police. If the hero of the story had been possessed of one spark of manhood, he would have gone off alone when Sylvia was delivering the baby; leaving his wife and his child together to live their own lives. If the heroine had been possessed of any sense of decency she could not have sustained her love for the kind of man she had married, and certainly would not have abandoned the baby.

UF such stuff as I relate is the story composed for our entertainment. If Fonda, as I suggest, had gone out alone to meet his fate without involving his family in it, there would have been more excuse for all that goes before. He at least would have assumed some proportions as a hero. But he is a snivelling coward to the end—and we are supposed to shed tears over the cruel hand fate had dealt him! If Towne and Baker had left him in the prison in which we first see him, and had written a story about two other people, Walter Wanger would have been able to give us a picture with more entertainment in it.

As it is, Walter's end of it—the production—is done spendidly. In fact, everything in the picture except the

story reflects expert craftsmanship. Fritz Lang's direction is masterly, his development of characters being particularly commendable—unless he is responsible for the employer who screams into the telephone. Fonda's performance is powerful in all its phases. Sylvia Sidney was unfortunate enough to be given an illogical, impossible characterization for which no audience could develop sympathy. William Gargan is splendid as the prison chaplain, a part which recalls Spencer Tracy in San Francisco. Gargan makes the priest human, lovable, the only heart-warming element in the unlovely whole. Barton MacLane is quietly impressive. All the performances, in short, are excellent. And Leon Shamroy's photography brings a series of superb etchings to the screen.

Misses Its Mark

DANGEROUS NUMBER, Metro production and release. Directed by Richard Thorpe; original story by Leona Dalrymple; screen play by Carey Wilson; musical score by David Snell; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, Daniel Cathcart and Edwin B. Willis; photographed by Leonard Smith; film editor, Blanche Sewell; assistant director, Dolph Zimmer. Cast: Robert Young, Ann Sothern, Reginald Owen, Cora Witherspoon, Dean Jagger, Marla Shelton, Barnett Parker, Charles Trowbridge. Runnting time, 69 minutes.

Reviewed by Allan Hersholt

FOLLOWING the triumphant appearance of My Man Godfrey, three or four major films have given evidence of attempting to feature with equal success the brand of humor found in the Universal production. None has been quite so fortunate. Dangerous Number, a Metro B offering, apparently makes this attempt, and

the outcome is not exactly a happy one.

Number is a trashy story which never should have been screened, its plot more than ordinarily flimsy and trite, its characters of the sort that fail to do what is important in any picture, even an insane comedy: arouse audience interest in them. Not infrequently the spectator sees a pair or more of them suddenly, and without sufficient reason, commence to do some totally imbecile thing, then abruptly stop and begin something even more mad, again for no even slightly convincing reason. As we know, far-fetched screen comedies can be delightfully entertaining, but there is such a thing as a photoplay of this type being too far-fetched and consequently unfunny. Dangerous Number is a notable example of that.

It would be unfair to charge Richard Thorpe with the deficiences of the picture. Throughout its length there are scenes which reflect credit on this director, but the material given him to work with was impossible from the outset. Thorpe has presented a number of highly successful directorial efforts recently, and as a result is above an assignment such as the Number story. which no director could have made into a notable picture. The narrative is unfolded with a too-generous dose of dialogue, all of which, to be sure, is well enough written, as might be expected from its author. Carey Wilson.

Ann Sothern and Robert Young, undeniably talented performers, head the cast in roles decidedly unworthy of their ability, and both do as well as possible. Reginald Owen, wasted on a small and inadequate part, also accomplishes the highest possible degree of success.

It Packs a Punch

PARK AVENUE LOGGER, Radio picture and RKO release. A George A. Hirliman production. Starring George O'Brien. Directed by David Howard; adaptation and screen play by Dan Jarrett and Ewing Scott; from the Saturday Evening Post story by Bruce Hutchison; associate producer, Leonard Goldstein; production manager, Charles Hunt; photographed by Frank B. Good; supervising editor, Robert Crandall; musical supervisor, Abe Meyer; art director, F. Paul Sylos; recorded by W. C. Moore. Supporting cast: Beatrice Roberts, Willard Robertson, Ward Bond, Bert Hanlon, Gertrude Short, Lloyd Ingraham, George Rosener, Robert Emmett O'Connor. Running time, 65 minutes.

Reviewed By Paul Jacobs

THERE are names among the cinematic great to whose pictures I go with a mild sense of foreboding. But ever since the unforgettable thrill of The Iron Horse, the name George O'Brien has represented for me the epitome of the enjoyable in action films. Park Avenue Logger gives George full opportunity to flex his gigantic muscles

and shed the light of his infectious grin.

Thus, despite its weakness, and there are several, the script by Dan Jarrett and Ewing Scott is good because it fulfills its mission. What Bruce Hutchison, the author, would say is another matter. At any odds, director David Howard has squeezed an amazing amount of first-rate drama and splendid acting from his material. Park Avenue Logger gives everyone, from the massive Mr. O'Brien and his charmingly high-spirited sweetheart, Beatrice Roberts, to old-timer Robert O'Connor, opportunities for distinctive portrayals; an opportunity which is fully achieved, to the self-evident advantage of the entire production.

Beautiful photography by Frank B. Good and general excellence of production by George A. Hirliman make *Park Avenue Logger* sturdy entertainment in its own right. Although it is intended as class B fare, it will stand on its own merits anywhere. In fact it could easily carry any supporting picture with it.

Mild But Amusing

WE'RE ON THE JURY, Radio production and release. Lee Marcus, producer; Joseph Henry Steele, associate producer; directed by Ben Holmes; from play, LADIES OF THE JURY, by John Frederick Ballard; screen play by Franklin Coen; photographed by Nick Musuraca; edited by Ted Cheesman; assistant director, Bob Barnes; features Victor Moore and Helen Broderick. Supporting cast: Philip Huston, Louise Latimer, Vinton Haworth, Robert McWade, Maxine Jennings, Frank M. Thomas, Colleen Clare, Billy Gilbert, Charles Lane, Charles Middleton, Jean Howard, Leonid Kinskey, Sarah Edwards, Hal K. Dawson, Edward Gargan, Earle Foxe, Roy James. Running time, 70 minutes.

Reviewed By Paul Jacobs

THE SPECTATOR ofter has remarked the blunder made by producers in overlooking the superior ability of old-time stars. Lee Marcus substantiates the SPECTATOR and vindicates himself in one gesture by offering us the rare talent of Victor Moore in the spotlight position. An actor of years' standing, Mr. Moore has been reinstated

finally to the rating he enjoyed years ago. It is one of the few such transactions of genuine benefit to both producer and audience. We're On The Jury gives Moore ample

opportunity to please his audience.

Translated by Franklin Coen from John Frederick Ballard's Ladies Of The Jury, We're On The Jury is little more than a laugh provoking sketch of the satirical type. Deftly etching the vanities and foibles of a typical jury, it moves lightly to a silly fade-out that reminded me of the two-reel Keystone era. But Ben Holmes does such a masterly job of directing and the cast is so completely excellent that the weaknesses are forgotten in the onrush of laughs.

Helen Broderick is, of course, splendid, her subtle, rhythmic comedy ranking in the top bracket of grin getters. That her characterization is inconsistent was no fault of her own, she is depicted as a silly, practically empty-pated lady who suddenly develops almost super-intelligence in solving the murder. That Helen Broderick could make her role as believable as she does, is a vast

tribute to her ability.

Particularly effective were Robert McWade and Maxine Jennings; check also an even excellence for the rest of the cast. As usual, Nick Musuraca gives us an effective job of photography, and Van Nest Polglasse is in his expected form. But for allowing the childish fadeout, Ted Cheesman's editing is irreproachable. We're On The Jury is strong support for any double bill.

Distinctly Entertaining

MIDNIGHT COURT, Warners production and release. Bryan Foy production. Directed by Frank McDonald; original screen play by Don Ryan and Kenneth Gamet; assistant director, Elmer Decker; photographed by Warren Lynch; film editor, Frank Magee; art director, Hugh Reticker. Cast: Ann Dvorak, John Litel, Carlyle Moore, Jr., Joseph Crehan, Walter Miller, William Davidson, John Sheehan, Stanley Fields, Gordon Elliott, Gordon Hart, Harrison Green, Charles Foy, Eddie Foster, Lyle Moraine, George Offerman, Jr., Joan Woodbury. Running time, 60 minutes.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

CONSIDERING the very important fact that director Frank McDonald quite evidently knows considerably more about direction than most of his confrères, Midnight Court is mildly disapppointing. It merely goes to prove that regardless of thoroughly competent direction and skilful acting, a film must support a large part of its weight on its story-translation. The progression of events, and their relation to the outcome is excellently done, a tribute to Don Ryan and Kenneth Gamet, but the totality of effect in the plotting somehow lost its élan in the translation from the original writing to screen adaptation. It is a subtle point, but justified and discernible to the audience.

John Litel scores as the fast-thinking lawyer whose regeneration is achieved through the characterful commonsense of Ann Dvorak. Carlyle Moore, Jr., is quite believable, and Stanley Fields as "Slim" Jacobs, makes me look with dark suspicion on the family escutcheon. The cast is long, but uniformly capable, so I am justified in

labeling it collectively fine.

In keeping with a precedent he has personally established, Bryan Foy gives *Midnight Court* the best in physical production. In fact, the production end characterizes the whole picture; it is utterly competent, with several scenes distinctly outstanding. That its total effect is not as vivid as its components, is no bar to its audience-appeal, because *Midnight Court* is distinctly entertaining.

Cinematic Pulse

By Paul Jacobs

AMONG the many and usually justified criticisms heaped upon the average picture, the most pertinent, perhaps, is its lack of originality. And although producers doubtless will greet this statement with smiles, I state definitely that originality is achieved easily, that it is simple in its make-up, and quickly reducible to its mechanical components—in the same way that theme, tempo, mood, and all the other subjective factors of the films can be objectified and measured. There is no unit of the filmic whole which cannot be isolated, dissected, and studied while functioning under laboratory methods.

First, let us see exactly what originality is, and what the ingredients are that make it up; in a later article we shall examine the human equation to find what typical habit-patterns in our nervous and mental machinery bar the average producer and writer from achieving originality. According to the dictionary, originality is the quality of being fresh, new, or novel. Thus, the films that are lacking in originality are trite, hackneyed, or bromidic. From this net of definitions the materials of originality are trites, hackneyed, or bromidic.

nality are sifted easily.

Originality obviously must demand the unusual, the unexpected or the undetermined. So a plot which presents an unusual situation or characterization is bound to prove interesting. Here, of course, you may ask how to find an unusual situation. The answer lies in our definition. Place a "usual" character against an "undetermined," background, and you have contrast, or unusualness. For example, put the Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. There you have a usual or pragmatic character contrasted with an unfamiliar background. The result is fresh, or original (or was, when Twain first used it as story material.)

HE same, almost mechanical process can be made to produce unlimited, sparkling novelty. All one has to do is to search the apparently commonplace, and pull from it an unusual conception, an unexpected twisting of the dramatic threads. By reversing the Connecticut Yankee idea, for instance, one could have a wild (unusual) man get lost in Hollywood. Or, as Rogers did in another picture, have a sprite from another world visit a prosaic atmosphere here, with amazing results. I do not mean these preposterous examples are valid; I simply am pointing out the limitless possibilities for originality by contrasting the known against the unknown, the usual against the unusual; a common type against an uncommon character, an uncommon person against a usual problem, a common type against an unusual problem, an uncommon type against an unusual background, with a usual problem-and so forth, inexhaustibly.

Still dealing with the mechanics of originality, we find another device for inducing the fresh and the novel. Let us go back again to our key terms, and see what we can get from the unexpected. To be dramatically valid, any unexpected plot action must hinge either upon, or be performed by, the central character. Thus, if a plot is seemingly predetermined, with the audience anticipating the ultimate movement or action of the main character—by building the climactic action to an emotionally tense condition where the main character is so moved and worked upon that he may logically react in a totally unexpected manner, originality is legitimately achieved. This device, incidentally, is one of the few permissible means of switching the story movement from tragedy to "lived happily ever after" ending.

A SIMPLER, but no less effective method of achieving originality is to allow the central character to respond as the audience expects to the climactic situation, but to fulfill his reaction in a totally unexpected manner, a manner made logical either by his previously established character traits, or by some justifying facts planted unostantatiously in the beginning and forgotten by the audience until the final action recalls them.

The above examples brings us to the use of a most powerful instrument for inducing originality—the use of irony. For instance, if the facts planted in the beginning are known to the audience, but are unknown to the main character, his attempts to achieve a goal made impossible through his lack of this knowledge, injects a strong dramatic flavor as the audience watches his mistakes with full cognizance of his futility. If, then, without the obvious use of coincidence, the hero unexpectedly can be made aware of his circumstances and win out, originality is achieved.

Irony offers, in its field, as many uncounted possibilities as contrast does. Whenever the audience congratulates itself on having guessed the outcome, only to find itself mistaken, irony explodes its zestful flavor. For example, suppose that in the last case cited, the hero, seemingly unaware of the missing and necessary facts, suddenly proves himself to have been aware of them all along, and produces his proof at the dramatically necessary moment. The audience is fooled, irony is evident. This device is particularly useful in comedy. It is evident, then, that the unanticipated is always sure to please an audience, provided it is logically introduced.

LET me cite just two more expressions of the use of irony in producing original stories, and then we shall draw our conclusions. Maupassant gives us the Necklace as an example where the true irony is not brought out until the surprise has already foredoomed the main character. This type is usuable for films only when the central character is the villain. The device is exemplified in O'Henry's The Cosmopolite in which the impulsive acts of the hero misinterpret his character to the audience. But since true character will out, the tenseful circumstances near the end, suddenly produce a situation in which is brought forth, logically, the actual inner man,

sometimes to the surprise of the hero himself, who perhaps has never known his own made-up. The "turning of the worm" plots are always a product of this device.

From the foregoing, it is evident that invention is used in the building of plot, and that imagination must be used in its development. It also becomes evident that originality has three applications. Originality of plotidea, originality of plot arrangement, or scenes and incidents, and originality of effect. It is in the achievement of effects that ingenuity is most needed, but it is here that the camera offers the largest opportunity. I will not go into detail on this point. Just let me cite some of the almost forgotten possibilities. *Montage* is almost unexploited, yet no single instrument is as powerful in creating emotional response. Nor is there any end to the starkly original effects it can produce.

The use of the *interpose* is next in ability to strip the soul from its cover and thus to bring out original treatment. Producers have forgotten it. The *double exposure* offers unexploited potentialities, even though it long has been abandoned. *Converged* and *axis* shots are powerful media for producing unusual emotional reaction. The list is endless. But since all these opportunities are consistently wasted, in the next issue I will examine with you the psychological aspect and see why we are inclined lazily to forfeit the rich possibilities lying dormant in the filmic machinery.

Art o

By James Brant

THERE is a quality of Art in anything worth while—cathedrals and machinery, music and literature, a home or an environment, a setter at point or a trotter heading down the stretch. Science also plays its part in human effort and progress. The two, science and art, may blend to the betterment of each. Perhaps they do, but whether they do or do not is not so important as the purpose lying behind the one or the other.

Down the ages has come the struggle for freedom. A deep desire for social and physical, mental and moral liberty as well as political liberty. In that forward march Art has played its part. Wisdom and depth of thought have come into being in beauteous form and harmonious expression. The art of happy presentation, the embodiment of an idea in an artistic conception, has given inspiration to following generations for further achievement.

Crime and corruption, given free rein, bring annihilating disaster. Criminals, allowed full sway, would reduce all society to the very lowest levels and life would be a constant fear and misery. If Art be the expression of lofty thoughts in beautiful and enduring form, then crime and corruption have nothing of Art. If it be maintained that criminals, some of them, are artists, it follows that as society provides for the suppression of crime and criminals, it necessarily regards with distaste and distrust the artistic work of criminals. Society, therefore, in effect has decreed that the art of crime and criminals is something to be done away with and destroyed.

WITH that attitude of society toward crime and criminals, involving the possible complete doing away of all crime, it is difficult to understand why crime and criminals should be taken and established as one of the outstanding and necessary attributes of Art. If dramatic presentation on stage or screen is art, one wonders why that which society has by its own degree declared to be not art at all, namely, crime and criminals, should be so fulsomely exploited as art and as artistic presentation.

But, for the stage and the screen, so critics have stated, there can not be drama without evil things to play against the good. Fair enough, but if society in any particular state or community should succeed in abolishing all crime within its confines, then such society would not be interested in anything pertaining to that which is known as the underworld, and drama would take on a character quite different from that at present prevailing.

The science of government may take on any form. Its administration may be crude and harsh, with terrorizing subjugation, and in such form it might be known, according to present standards, as artistic rule. But, if scientific government should by a strange, outside chance take on a form of rule that had within itself the ideals of true Art, there would be harmony in its working and it would be an expression of truth, integrity, justice and other like and similar qualities. So that it is quite proper for one to wonder and consider whether liberty is the correct and only true expression of the art of governing.

AR is sometimes referred to as scientific. The killing of a sufficient number of people and the destruction of a certain amount of property in order to collect tribute may properly be called artistic warfare. A fair amount of logical reasoning fails to uncover virtuous art in the killing of human kind and the wilful destruction of property. Still, it must be there because war is scientific, and warfare is the art of using scientific means to the best advantage to accomplish wholesale annihilation.

So Our Masters sit and ponder, write heavy notes, try to trade for advantage, back and fill and four-flush a little, all to determine whether it will be a more artistic performance to knock off a few thousand with submarine torpedoes, or whether bombs from airplanes would polish them more nicely; whether the gut-burning machine gun and rifle should be discarded for the deadly gas, or vice versa. Warfare must become civilized, so it has been voiced, and it is going to be a tough job for somebody to figure out how and in what way the wholesale killing of men and women shall be elevated to a civilized art. Further consideration offers the question whether such killing and such destruction ever are civilized, ever artistic or ever an expression of Art.

N the field of literature and also journalism, any subject well presented with a choice selection of words, is a work of art because literature and, presumably, journalism are art and therefore anything coming under the head of literature or journalism must of necessity be a bit of artistic work. Just how literature and journalism which cater to depraved tastes and vacuous minds are art is something for critics to dissertate to their hearts' content.

The motion picture is, properly, an art embodying varied arts. The arts of dramatic writing, acting, direction, lighting, music, and other, enter into its production. The motion picture happens to be an art, supplemented with scientific achievement, that appeals direct to the public in a way and in a manner that is intelligible to all kinds and classes except, possibly, the dumbest of the dumb. In view of its broad appeal and its tremendous potential force for inducing thought that later shapes into action, the motion picture should be held to the very highest and the purest and cleanest art.

When the motion picture caters to depraved taste, resorts to the picturing of the filth of human life and exhibits passion in a manner to incite destructive and destroying thought, it becomes one with crime and criminals, a something to be held in check, suppressed and obliterated. The glorification and exhibition of the human body seems to be one of the peculair delights of motion picture producers.

NOTHING particularly wrong about it, properly handled, but why? It stinks in life and rots in death; is crippled and deformed; has the bellyache most of the time and is otherwise diseased. Much better, perhaps even from a financial standpoint, to show the workings of nobility, the play of minds in contact and in conflict, the longing heart and struggle of souls to higher estate.

The human mass is unthinking; buys what is offered to it, mostly; takes what is handed to it, generally; progress, therefore, is dependent, mostly and generally, on a very few in delegated power. Because those few, very naturally and very humanly, are thinking principally of their own interest, society as a whole moves forward slowly.

But if we, thou and I, could hold full sway, how we would change conditions! With thee and me prescribing entertainment and education the world would quickly change to a happier state. But even thou and I, so wellnigh perfect, are yet a trifle frail in some respects and so might lapse a little upon occasion. With thee and me, though, that would not matter much for we, thou and I, are far above the milling crowd and easily exempt. Still, even to us, thee and me, might come a desperate plight. Methinks, for thee and me it would be better, far better, if we, thou and I, did not try to change the whole world all at once.

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FREDRICK Y. SMITH

FILM EDITOR
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

Spectator and the Class-Room

With a consistent point of view, sound artistic judgment, and an intelligent sense of values, the SPECTATOR is a delightful and stimulating guide to any worker in the field of motion picture appreciation. I know of no other magazine half so helpful to the teacher.—MRS. JESSAMINE 1. WEBSTER, Rutherford Senior High School, Rutherford, New Jersey.

As a teacher of English, I find myself continually quoting and reading the articles and reviews in the SPECTATOR to all of my classes. In my opinion it is the only motion picture magazine that is of high literary value in content as well as in the manner in which it is expressed.—HELEN MAE STEPHENSON, Madison Public Schools, Madison, New Jersey.

Our English classes find the SPECTATOR of aid in the study of Motion Picture Appreciation. I subscribed for it in order that the head of our English Department might have it for use in connection with her classes in that subject. About three years ago we organized a course in motion picture appreciation using Motion Pictures and Youth, by Dale, as a text. In connection with it we also had copies of the SPECTATOR and have found it of inestimable value in making studies of plays reviewed in it. —PERCIVAL S. BARNES, Superintendent, The Public Schools, East Hartford, Connecticut.

It is my custom to suggest that the teachers of Motion Picture Appreciation in the New Jersey High Schools make constant use of the SPECTATOR. A few reasons: You are frank and unbiased in expressing your opinions and judgments. Your preview reports arrive days ahead of material available from any other source. With the SPECTATOR on her desk, the teacher is closer to the center of motion picture activity. The teacher who uses the SPECTATOR will develop a pleasant feeling of comfort and at-homeness with her work. She will begin to know "what it is all about."—WILLIAM F. BAUER, Director, East Orange High School, East Orange, New Jersey.

Feeling that the study of Motion Picture Appreciation should be widely extended throughout this and other countries, I would bespeak the value of the publication, HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR. If Mr. Beaton's ideals can become universal all who are connected with the education of the youth of our land will owe him a deep debt of gratitude for his enterprising endeavors in this field. We recommend the SPECTATOR as giving the most reliable information concerning the screen of any publication which we know.—BESSIE N. LEONARD, The Clarke School for the Deaf, Northampton, Massachusetts.

SPECTATOR

Eleventh Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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No. 23

"The Good Earth" and the "Hollywood Spectator"

Metro Picture Is Made a Screen Masterpiece
By Its Adherence to the Cinematic
Principles Which This Paper Has
Championed Persistently Since
Sound Came to Hollywood

.... REVIEWS....

THE GOOD EARTH *** ON THE AVENUE *** READY, WILLING AND ABLE BREEZING HOME *** OUTCAST *** MAMA STEPS OUT *** SEA DEVILS BULLDOG DRUMMOND ESCAPES *** TWO WISE MAIDS *** NOBODY'S BABY WINGS OF THE MORNING *** TIME OUT FOR ROMANCE

"The Good Earth" and The "Spectator"

THE GOOD EARTH, Metro production and release. Associate producer, Albert Lewin; directed by Sidney Franklin; co-stars Paul Muni and Luise Rainer; features Walter Connolly, Tilly Losch, Charley Grapewin and Jessie Ralph; screen play by Talbot Jennings, Tess Schlesinger and Claudine West; based on novel by Pearl S. Buck; adapted to stage by Owen Davis and Donald Davis; musical director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Harry Oliver, Arnold Gillespie and Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe, Dolly Tree; photographed by Karl Freund; film editor, Basil Wrangell; montage by Slavko Vorkapich. Supporting cast: Soo Yong, Keye Luke, Roland Lui, Suzanna Kim, Chingwah Lee, Harold Huber, Olaf Hytten, William Law, Mary Wong. Running time, 130 minutes. (Arranged for intermission.)

DY this time both Eastern and Western critics have had B their say about The Good Earth. It is hailed as one of the really great pictures in the history of the screen. Motion picture people, those who conceive and create the pictures in all the studios, have seen the Metro offering and declare it a masterpiece. Even at the afternoon showing, the Carthay Circle Theatre is crowded with people who came to see The Good Earth and depart thrilled by it.

So we may take it that the picture is going to achieve the end for which it was made. It is going to make a great deal of money for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Responsible for the profits it will earn will be the word-ofmouth advertising of those who see it first and continue to talk about it after the public has forgotten what the critics said about it. The fact that the public itself will advertise the picture is a tribute to the manner in which it was made. Hollywood makes pictures for the sole purpose of making money, and if each earns the profits its story material makes possible, we can credit its producers with having done a satisfactory job.

The Good Earth as a picture starts off with the advantage of having a well advertised name, but if it is seen only by those who have read the book, it will not return the money spent in its making. It is reported it cost two million dollars. To return this sum after the cost of exploitation and the exhibitors' share are deducted from its receipts, it will have to attract at least ten million people to the box-office, and I do not believe in all the history of popular fiction that many people read any one book.

HE picture, therefore, not the book, will be responsible for the enormous profits its makers are destined to receive. What, then, is going to make the picture successful? The story material? Scarcely. It deals with the last people in whom we reasonably could be expected to become interested—an illiterate Chinaman and the kitchen slave whom he took as wife, inherently uninteresting people with both hands and feet in the soil which yields reluctantly to their efforts to make a living; people with whom few of the scores of millions who will have to see the picture to make it profitable, have anything in common. And the story is as drab as the people whose affairs it relates, a thing of pestilence and famine, of hardships, toil and suffering. Nothing there with the elements of popularity. But I repeat—the picture will attract audiences which will make it an enormous financial success.

Now let us forget the picture for a moment and take up the second part of the heading I have put over this discussion, The Good Earth and the Spectator.

I hope readers will bear with me while I repeat some of the convictions expressed so often in these pages they have become almost platitudinous utterances: The story is not the element of chief importance to a motion picture. It is screen art which entertains. It is a pictorial art which expresses itself in visual terms. It is not an acting art. It is an art of projecting emotions visually. Dialogue is a poisonous element which saps its strength. The camera should tell the story with as little reliance as possible on spoken dialogue. No story told in dialogue can compete at the box-office with a story of comparative merit told in pictures. We are more receptive to what we can see than to what we have to listen to.

L VER since sound came to Hollywood the Spectator consistently has championed the cause of pure screen art. In season and out it has acclaimed its conviction that the better the art becomes the better the business will be, that screen art is easier to sell than photographed stage art. Even intelligent readers who agreed with its stand and applauded its intentions, must have grown tired of its constant reiteration. I am tired of it myself. Unintelligent people regard me as some kind of nut and the Spectator as a thing of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Producers have regarded the Spectator as a pest. The producing organizations flood with their extravagant advertising any film publication which will feed the fattened ego of their executives, but they will not spend a cent with the SPECTATOR, which is the only publication devoted exclusively to the betterment of their business.

The Spectator is not a journal of flattery which accepts the magnitude of executives' salaries as a reflection of the magnitude of their intellectual capabilities. It has said repeatedly, and says again, that Hollywood producers have not the remotest knowledge of the kind of business they are in, that they are ignorant of the fundamentals of screen art, are unaware of the reason for the vast popularity of film entertainment, that their pictures are not making half the money they would make if they were produced intelligently.

AND it says now The Good Earth will make a lot of money, that it will be one of the greatest grossers in film history. And it first said long ago that any picture which in its making observed the laws of screen art, must make a lot of money, irrespective of its story content. Mani-

HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR, published every second Saturday in Hollywood, California, by Hollywood Spectator, Inc., Welford Beaton, president; Howard Hill, secretary-treasurer. Office, 6513 Hollywood Boulevard; telephone GLadstone 5213. Subscription price, five dollars the year; two years, eight dollars; foreign, six dollars. Single copies 20 cents. Advertising rates on application.

festly, then, The Good Earth, to achieve the success I predict for it, must have observed the laws of its art, must have followed the specifications the Spectator has presented so many times. I have not postulated it is good entertainment, have not expressed my personal opinion that it is a good picture and then looked for arguments to support the opinion.

My approach is oblique. If The Good Earth has been made according to the specifications so repeatedly set forth by the Spectator, it must be good entertainment, must have outstanding appeal. If it has ignored these specifications and still earns the profits I predict for it, then the Spectator has been shooting in the dark and

no longer is worthy of being taken seriously.

LET us see. The screen is a visual art. We will start with that. The performance of Luise Rainer is one of the greatest ever presented on the screen. With extraordinary vividness we become aware that she lives only to serve her husband, to give him sons, to advance his material welfare by working beside him in the fields. We are impressed with her patience, her unselfishness, her deep sense of loyalty; we respond warmly to her emotional appeal, we share her thoughts, approve her viewpoint, rejoice with her when she is happy, sorrow with her when she is sad.

Never once in the entire picture does Luise Rainer utter one word that serves even remotely as a key to her emotion; she never laughs, rarely speaks, only occasionally we see on her lips the shadow of a smile. Only her eyes are alive. They tell us everything. The camera pries out their mysteries and make them clear to us. Her performance is entirely, completely and vividly visual. It is screen art permitted to function, the art incompetent producers laugh at, claiming they are businessmen, not purveyors of art.

P AUL MUNI laughs. It is part of his characterization as a happy, optimistic, ambitious Chinaman with reverence for the soil. But the fact of our hearing his laughter adds no strength to his performance. We see the laughter in his eyes, but making it audible to us is permissible use of the microphone. It has to make essential dialogue audible, and it would be carrying our loyalty to screen art to absurd lengths if it did not pick up also the incidential sounds accompanying it.

The screen is not an acting art, the SPECTATOR maintains. (Muni does not act; does not use his voice to project his emotions to us. His performance is magnificent because he feels the part, is Wang; because he ignores the existence of an audience, because the camera brings us so close to him we see his feelings in his eyes. Never for an instant does he suggest the actor trying to convey something to us. His performance is visual, its audible element being merely a minor accompaniment. Screen art, not stage art, is his medium of expression.

If the members of the Academy ever can learn to differentiate between acting and screen characterization, Miss Rainer and Muni already have won this year's awards for the best performances, for it is too much to hope that

any other players throughout the year will reach the heights of artistic perfection they attain in *The Good Earth*.

AND it is too much to hope that during the year Hollywood will cease photographing chatter long enough to give us another motion picture even approaching in its power and impressiveness this great saga of Chinese soil, one which so consistently will keep the camera in its rightful place as the screen's story telling medium. The brilliantly written screen play of The Good Earth does not tell us a drought is coming. Reference is made in dialogue to what a drought would mean, knowledge essential for us to have, but it is the camera which takes us to it when it comes, which reveals to us its devastating effect, which fairly makes our feet warm when it leads us across the baked surface of the fields it burns.

The camera takes us into homes on the heels of the suffering the scorching sun brings to their inmates; it directs our eyes to a bubbling mass in the bottom of a pot around which O-Lan (Miss Rainer) and her children are gathered, and she enlightens us as to its contents with a short speech, precisely as a spoken title was used when pictures were silent: "Earth: when it's warm it makes their stomachs feel full." It is the camera which makes the scene poignant; the words merely mark its focal point. And they are all the words that are spoken.

BRIEF dialogue acquaints us with the fact of there being food in the south. The camera does the rest. It shows us half-starved hordes making their way southward, the hardships they experience when they reach their destination, how nearly O-Lan comes to being shot for looting when rioting breaks out following the revolution, how riches unexpectedly come to Wang's family, his resolution to return to the land that is his home. What little dialogue there is in all this merely is part of the atmosphere. It does not carry any of the burden of the story. It is visual entertainment. It is motion picture.

The tremendous spectacle of the invasion of locusts is punctuated with dialogue, with shouted directions to those battling with the pest, but the sequence gets all its value from the camera. We would lose nothing if we could not hear what is said, therefore the dialogue demands no more mental effort on our part that we expend when we hear a dog barking. Wang's change in his way of living, his taking up residence in the Great House, the civic importance his riches give him, O-Lan's grief when he takes a second wife—all the rest of the story, everything in it makes it the most engrossing picture of its length ever presented on the screen—all of it the camera's work, all of it visual.

But—the picture making being a business—all The Good Earth's compliance with the demands of screen art would be of importance only in respect to its effect on the box-office. Is good art good business?

GOOD art is good business. That is why the Spectator is so persistent in its pleas for recognition of the art. For one thing, more story can be packed into one hour

of visual entertainment than into two hours of dialogue. When the film industry abandoned the motion picture business and went over wholly to talkies, it short-changed the public from which it was getting its riches; it made a bigger, louder, more showy package, but put into it only half the merchandise it previously had sold as a unit. If you do not believe this, watch a race at Santa Anita; go into the clubhouse when the next is run, then have someone good at descriptions describe the race you missed until your impression of it is as vivid as the impression of the one you saw. Even if it could be done, it would take a quarter of an hour for your brain to get the picture your eyes got in a minute.

There you have the reason for the double-feature program which is making the exhibitors' going tough. It takes two features to give the audience as much story as one silent picture gave it. You cannot short-change the public and get away with it.

And even that is not the main difference between the talkie and the motion picture, between *Dodsworth* and *The Good Earth*. Fundamentally they are as far apart as the poles, a fact of which anyone with a modicum of picture brains is aware.

VISUAL entertainment is universal. The whole family enjoyed a silent picture because each member saw in the procession of visual images what his imagination was capable of creating for his entertainment. Thus he entertained himself with his individual interpretation of what he saw on the screen. Nothing real was offered him to disturb the unity of the illusion of reality. The adult saw one story, the child another, and both were satisfied, for each saw what entertained him most. Only the emotions functioned.

Talkie entertainment is not universal. *Dodsworth* demands the functioning of the intellect. You have to listen to it, as you have to listen to the description of the horse race; your brain must interpret what your ears convey to it. The whole family cannot enjoy it as the intellectual powers of its various members are not of equal receptive and interpretative capacity.

The Good Earth is universal entertainment. Its dialogue is simple, as befits the simple people who utter it, but if there be in it some passages the child will not grasp, there is, by way of compensation, enough of the simple language of pictures to enable him to fashion for himself a connected story to make him unconscious of the fact that he is missing anything his father is getting. So complete is the pictorial imagery of The Good Earth, a deaf person could enjoy it. Imagine a deaf person trying to follow the story of Dodsworth!

HERE is nothing new in anything I have written here. Every thought has been expressed time after time on Spectator pages as theories based on my convictions, but they lacked concrete endorsement in the form of a film production in which they were incorporated. Now comes The Good Earth to make the abstract theories box-office facts. But will Hollywood profit by the lesson The Good Earth can teach it? Oh, dear, no! You cannot

fool Hollywood! It may blink for a moment when it regards the box-office returns from the Metro picture, but soon it will know the reason for its success. It will be because the leading characters are Chinese. It will be because it has locusts in it, because Paul Muni had to shave his head, because Luise Rainer does not use lipstick, because Charlie Grapewine's eyes are slanted. Tell a producer The Good Earth is a great picture because it is made exactly as the Spectator has claimed all pictures should be made, and the chances are it will give him apoplexy.

You cannot make fools of Hollywood producers because nature beat you to it. Those of them who have seen The Good Earth are singing its praises, yet they are ignorant of the reason for their singing. They will not learn from it the wisdom of making their productions conform to the dictates of screen art; they do not admit there is such an art. They can produce their salary checks to establish the fact of their greatness, so, when they say there is no screen art—well, there simply ain't no such art, and that is all there is to it. Sure, a lot of pictures lose money, but that is because the public is dumb—doesn't know what it wants. What chance do you think Galloping Girl has in the fourth race at Santa Anita 'safternoon?

Editor's Easy Chair

ONE of the notes the postman brought this week: "I have read a few copies of the SPECTATOR which I filched from a friend, but now I wish you would send it to me regularly. I agree with most of your arguments, but do not follow you in your claim that the screen is a definite art. To me, a recruit from the New York stage, it is a business and nothing more. I am making more money now than I ever dreamed I'd make..." The extraordinarily rapid growth in the Spectator's circulation presents a problem. Old subscribers have to be spared constant reiteration of its convictions, while new subscribers, unfamiliar with them, get a wrong opinion of many of the arguments it presents. For instance, the new subscriber whom I quote does not know that I regard the screen as he does. I view it as a business, nothing more, but I do not believe producers are conducting their business in a manner to develop all its business possibilities. My persistent pleading for recognition of the screen as an art is based upon my conviction that the art is the marketable element in the industry's product. Before big names and massive productions were offered for sale, when the entertainment medium was in its simplest form and had nothing except itself to sell, the screen jumped with extraordinary suddenness into popularity with the entire world and laid the foundation for the great industry which has been reared upon it. In those days every picture released made money. Last year out of 421 major features released, 126 did normal business or better, and 295 earned less than normal returns, 112 of them earning no profits, and sixty-eight being outright

flops. I quote these figures from Norman Webb's Nation Box Office Digest.

HERE must be a reason. I ascribe it to the industry's action in complicating the fundamental appeal of its product by the infusion of elements alien to the art form which achieved its first success when its mechanical limitations made such infusions technically impossible and it was forced to tell its stories in visual terms-in other words, when it abandoned screen art and went over wholly to the stage, making its entertainment aural instead of visual. If there be any merit in my contention, the picture today which pleases the public most must be the one which relies most on the visual element. Again consulting the Digest's tables: The five pictures which led the box-office parade last year were San Francisco, Mutiny on the Bounty, The Great Ziegfeld, Follow the Fleet, Rose Marie. Here we have a wealth of visual appeal: the ruin of a city by earthquake, a sea picture, an extraordinary "pretty girl" spectacle, dancing with a naval background, and the great outdoors superbly photographed. Such social dramas as are well up in the list were made successful by the drawing power of the stars appearing in them.

KEEPING in mind always the fact that picture making is a hard-boiled business, let us take up another Spectator contention—that Hollywood is harming its business by raiding the stage for players skilled in stage acting. Ever since the screen began to talk I have argued that it is not an acting art, that stage actors harm it, that it is an art of projection of personality, not of acting technique. I have urged the development of personality and have claimed a player's financial value to the film industry is lessened in the degree of his mastery of stage technique. To support the contention, I have analyzed screen art, delved into its fundamentals, until readers must have grown tired of my yammerings. In any event, producers ignored them. The moment an actor achieved prominence on the New York stage, he was captured and conveyed to Hollywood. Producers are businessmen, they claim, and they regard it as good business to get trained actors to replace the fresh-faced boys and girls who are growing up in the picture business. The SPECTATOR's claim is that it is bad business. If the producers hold the right view, the list of film box-office favorites must be headed by such names as Leslie Howard, Walter Huston, Paul Muni, Claude Rains, who have been in pictures long enough to have their names identified with them. But who are the leading motion picture favorites?

QUIGLEY PUBLICATIONS, further to serve the film industry with its accustomed thoroughness, has added a new publication to its list. Fame is a purely business publication. It made this request to exhibitors in the United States, Canada and Great Britain: "Please list in order the ten players whose pictures drew the greatest number of patrons to your theatre." There is hard-boiled business for you. Quigley did not ask the Spectator what it thought about the relative box-office draw of stage and screen actors, did not indulge in abstract dis-

cussions of the integrity of screen art, as the Spectator, lacking definite figures upon which to base its reasoning, must do if it is to discuss the matter at all. Exhibitors were asked to count the actual cash in their tills and tell Fame where it came from. Leslie Howard? Claude Rains? No-Shirley Temple drew more money into the world's box-offices last year than any other player, male or female. It is almost a year since I recorded in these pages my opinion that Shirley was the greatest player on the screen. As I base all my contentions upon what I regard as the best business interests of films, all the boxoffice had to do to prove me right was to report that Shirley brought it more money than any other player. And that is what the box-office reports. I did not claim she is the most skilled actress on the screen. She is not an actress. She has an extraordinary personality and possesses the ability to meld it into any part she plays. Her beauty helps, but it is not an essential aid.

AND do not give Shirley's pictures credit for having much to do with her box-office rating. She heads the list in spite of the pictures in which she was presented, not because of them. Century never has understood what it has to sell in little Shirley Temple, never has put her in a picture worthy of her, yet she leads all others, by virtue of the possession of native qualities the stage could not develop in her to fit her for a screen career. Second on the international list of best box-office players are Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers as a team. Here again we have in Astaire just a grown-up Shirley Temple, a man with a charming personality and the ability to project it, added to graceful agility as a dancer. Fred is not an actor, nor is he a singer, but at what we call acting and singing, he has earned his high box-office rating with the personality he puts into them. Nor is Ginger Rogers an actress, if by actress we mean Luise Rainer, Greta Garbo, Miriam Hopkins, Barbara Stanwyck, or many others who rate far below her on the list. Clark Gable is second on the American list and fourth on the international list, Gracie Fields being third on the latter. In order on the American list come Astaire-Rogers, third, Robert Taylor, Joe E. Brown, Joan Crawford, Claudette Colbert, Jeanette MacDonald, Gary Cooper. Next in order is the exhibitors' rating come fifteen under the classification, "Honor Stars." They are headed by Jane Withers. The Howards and Munis, whose screen performances are rare intellectual treats, are headed by a few score whose personalities and ability to express them in cinematic terms make their appeal to our emotions and whose box-office strength was developed in pictures and was not transplanted from the stage. And that should establish the truth of the Spectator's contention that the stage has nothing to contribute to the screen, a contention I have argued until I am as sick of it as you are.

WHEN the producers learn how to read original stories sent to them, there will be fewer journeys to New York in search of plays which can be photographed and offered to the public falsely labelled as motion pictures. As a sporting gesture, Harry Cohn's action in paying \$200,000 for a play is entertaining; as a picture business

transaction it is the height of idiocy. If he had advertised he was in the market for ten screen stories, for which he would pay \$20,000 apiece, the best writers in the world would have submitted material. Harry's difficulty, one he shares with all his fellow producers, would be in discovering the cinematic values of the stories sent him. He probably still is unaware of the cinematic values of the play for which he paid such an absurd price, but the public has hailed its stage values, and that is enough for Harry, as it was also for the other film producers who competed for it. If the story of the play is worth that much for pictures, it would be worth more if written originally for the screen with the author's chief concern always being the camera as the medium which ultimately would express it for presentation to the public. But if you can imagine a picture producer paying \$200,000 for an original screen story, one conceived and executed solely for the medium in which it was going to be expressed, you have an imagination fertile enough to make a fortune for you as a screen writer. Of all the crazy things the film industry does, the craziest is its manner of searching for its story material. It has plenty of stuff submitted to it, but the task of examining it for screen values is assigned to readers who do not know what screen values are. Many of them have had experience in estimating the values of stories for publication in magazines or in book form, but they are totally unaware their studio task is not one of looking for stories. It is one of looking for motion pictures.

HE author who writes a story for the camera is at the mercy of the studio reader who lacks the screen training necessary to enable him to visualize the story as he reads it. Let us say an original screen story has a sequence showing Mary and John in a moonlit garden, exchanging conversational platitudes, the value of the sequence being the stealing closer of their hands and finally an embrace. In a book there would be a rich word-painting of the garden, the mirrored moon in the lily pond, the outstretched arms of the elms against the softly illuminated sky, the mingled perfume of the lilac and the rose, the song of the mocking bird on the still night air, diamonds the moon sprinkles in Mary's hair, the silvered softness of the color of her gown-words woven into garlands to lure the studio reader, trained in reaction to literary charms, into the mood of the scene until he is impressed with its beauty and stirred by its romantic glamor.

BUT the trained screen author, assuming his script was to be read by a trained screen reader, would compress the sequence into its physical elements, into the action of Mary and John in going into the garden, holding hands, finally embracing. The author would realize the sequence derived all its values from its romantic setting—from the moon, the trees, the flowers, the lily pond and the mocking bird—but he knows the studio has departments manned by geniuses in the art of producing such effects. He would know it was not his task to write a motion picture, but to suggest one for motion picture minds to make into a picture. But studio readers being what they are, they undoubtedly would deem the sequence a stupid

one because nothing really happened in it. Now if John had choked Mary to death, or drowned her by holding her head under a floating lily-well, there would be something the studio reader could grasp in a flash; it would be violent enough to shock him into seeing it. So our trained screen writer, knowing what he would be up against, never becomes a trained screen writer. He knows a better way to get money out of the screen industry, a way by which he can get a whole lot more money than he could by becoming a trained screen writer: He writes for book publishers, magazine editors or play producers, developing his story values for mediums in no way related to the screen, and picture producers stumble over one another to grab his stuff and pay him fabulous sums for it. So, while the final solution of the industry's story problem lies in the establishment of its own source of original story material, any writer with ability to supply some of it would be a damned fool if at the present time he embarked on a career as a writer of original stories for the screen.

ET us hope the Academy's voting for the best performances of the past year will not be based on the standards which Jimmie Fiddler applies to his judging. In a recent broadcast, Jimmie eliminated Paul Muni's Louis Pasteur on the ground that Paul long since had established himself as a really great actor and such a performance was to be expected from him. Gary Cooper's Mr. Deeds does not get Jimmie's vote because Gary is not an actor, therefore was compelled to play himself. Jimmie's choice is Spencer Tracy for his priest in San Francisco. Having dismissed acting technique and personality as determining factors in making his award, Jimmie lights on a man who combines both more skilfully than perhaps any other player in pictures. The very reason Jimmie advances for selecting Tracy is the one for which he excludes Muni. But that is not the funniest feature of his reasoning. If he knew what screen acting is, to be consistent he would have to give acting honors to Gary Cooper or withdraw his remarks about Gary's not being an actor. He complains that Gary plays himself, and is unaware that that is precisely what screen acting consists of—the projection, not of acting technique, but of personality. Gary's Mr. Deeds is a superb characterization because he absorbed the part so completely, became so entirely the character, that he did not have to act it. Without being aware of it, Jimmie really nominated Gary for the acting award. Not for the world would I disturb Jimmie's fascinating cocksuredness. If I thought criticism would penetrate it, I would not criticize him. I like bantam roosters. I do not know what they expect to accomplish by their strutting, but I love to watch them strut.

HOLLYWOOD studios turn out class A and class B product. Henry Ford makes two kinds of cars, Lincoln (class A) and Ford (class B). Ford, the world's greatest industrialist, does not deem his class B product unimportant because it costs less per unit than the class A product. He made his name the symbol for mechanical perfection in both the high price and low price fields. When you buy either a Lincoln or a Ford, you know

what you are buying. With your admission to a picture house you do not know what you are buying. If you read the advertisements you are assured the picture you are going to see is the greatest, grandest, most glorious one ever made. You are not informed it is a class B production turned out in the shortest possible time and shot onto the market for no reason other than that it already has been sold. If Ford rated his class B product in the same manner it would take less time to watch the Fords go by. The selling advantage the film industry has is the necessity of exhibitors to keep their houses open, while no one is compelled to buy a Ford. Producers take advantage of the situation. Universal, however, announces it will make no more class B pictures. Adolph Zukor, with a quarter century's experience in selling pictures, declared in a New York interview that the policy of making class B product is an unwise one and that hereafter Paramount would make all its pictures start from scratch, each striving to reach class A standard, but he added with ingenuous frankness that some of them, of course, would not reach that standard. United Artists refused to permit one of its members, Alexander Korda, to sign a contract to produce pictures costing \$200,000 each, the explanation being that such cheap pictures would not be up to the United Artists standard. As a result, Korda agrees to make a series, the cost not to be below \$300,000 each.

CLASS B product is doing the film industry an injury it will be a long time recovering from. It has got the producers into the habit of rating the entertainment quality of pictures by the number of dollars it takes to make them. If Korda gets a good story, shoots it against a background of the matchless rural scenery of England, introduces in it some refreshingly new faces and by virtue of having no expensive sets to build and big salaries to pay, brings in a highly entertaining picture which will please audiences but upon which he could not spend more than a quarter of a million dollars—if Korda does all that, his partners in United Artists, already on record as declaring that a picture cannot be good if it costs less than \$300,-000, will refuse to release it and will charge him with breach of contract because he saved some money. Class B pictures also are rated on the basis of cost, and as they are the cheapest pictures the industry makes, they are ground out on the theory that speed in making them is more important than the careful development of their story possibilities. So restricted as to time and money are the producers in charge of them and the directors who make them, it is almost impossible for a class B production to develop entertaining qualities to justify what the public is charged to view it. Most of the class B pictures I see merely are underdeveloped class A potentialities. Adolph Zukor's new policy for Paramount is a step in the right direction, but since he took charge of his studio's production activities Paramount product has not indicated that his quarter of a century's experience in selling pictures has taught him how to make them.

AN Eastern critic chastises the public for its failure to make Shakespearean pictures pay at the box-office. Years ago, when it carried its first review of a picture made from one of Shakespeare's plays, the Spectator

said that the Bard of Avon was not, and could not be made, box-office. Every such picture made since that time proved the Spectator to be right, but I am not sure Hollywood yet is entirely cured of its Shakespearean complex. At all events, there is no justice in calling the public ignorant because it will not buy what it does not want. As a matter of fact, the public is the only wholly intelligent factor in picture making. The box-office is the barometer which registers its opinion as to what should and should not be presented on the screen. Its sense for spotting cinematic values is unerring. It will try almost anything once, but in the long run what does not belong on the screen will be spurned. In the role of goat, however, the public is valuable. If a picture fails, it never is the producer's fault. It fails because the public is ignorant. The size of the producer's salary check is quite enough to assure us that no one worth all that money could be mistaken about anything. To solace the Eastern critic, I would like to assure him that if the screen ever develops its own Shakespeare, he will not be a success on the stage. The two arts speak different languages. A photograph of the stage is not a motion picture, and motion pictures are what the public wants and has the sense to recognize. When Hollywood becomes as intelligent as the public, there will be no box-office failures.

Some Late Previews

In Every Way Satisfactory

ON THE AVENUE, 20th-Fox release of Irving Berlin's production. Associate producer, Gene Markey; co-stars Dick Powell and Madeleine Carroll; features Alice Faye, the Ritz Brothers and George Barbier; directed by Roy Del Ruth; screen play by Gene Markey and William Conselman; music and lyrics by Irving Berlin; dances staged by Seymour Felix; photographed by Lucien Andriot; art direction, William Darling; associate, Mark-Lee Kirk; sets by Thomas Little; assistant director, William J. Scully; film editor, Allen McNeil; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; sound, Joseph Aiken and Roger Heman; musical direction, Arthur Lange. Supporting cast: Alan Mowbray, Cora Witherspoon, Walter Catlett, Douglas Fowley, Joan Davis, Stepin Fetchit, Sig Rumann, Billy Gilbert, E. E. Clive, Douglas Wood, John Sheehan, Paul Irving, Harry Stubbs, Paul Gerrits, Ricardo Mandia, Edward Cooper. Running time, 90 minutes.

UITE the cleverest of the sort that we have had. With Shocking disregard for screen traditions which demand that all such stories must be about a former playboy's efforts to stage a show on Broadway, managing to do it only at the last moment when the heroine dashes in with a bankroll just as the scenery is being loaded on a truck to take it to the warehouse in Brooklyn-spurning all this and actually thinking up something new, Gene Markey and Bill Conselman save us the birth pains of the play and open on it underway. That is one of the admirable features of On the Avenue. Another is that every glimpse we get of the stage performance is part of the story. We are not treated to a series of interruptions to the story, nor is any effort made to stun us with magnificent scenic effects. There are some imposing spectacles in the production, but they are worked in as story elements and sustain the continuity of our interest in what is happening to the characters involved in the romance.

The refreshing newness of the story and the brilliant direction given it by Roy Del Ruth have quite as much

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to do with making the picture entertaining as has the excellence of the Irving Berlin music and the outstanding performances contributed by all the members of the long cast. Del Ruth keeps the story in the foreground at all times and adds sparkle to the lively sense of humor revealed by Markey and Conselman in building situations and writing dialogue. I was getting fed up on back-stage stories, but this one revives my interest in them. It is one you should see.

OST of the story is handed to Dick Powell, Madeleine Carroll and Alice Faye. Each of them appears to better advantage than ever before. Both in singing and acting Dick rises to new heights, responding with zest to Del Ruth's direction and developing rich results from the Berlin words and music. The beautiful Madeleine is captivating in a nicely shaded performance, and Alice Faye's appealing personality and pleasing singing voice will win the favor of any audience. The Ritz Brothers are as crazy as ever and even more amusing than usual with their hilarious antics. Others who contribute to the feast of fun are George Barbier, Alan Mowbray, Cora Witherspoon and Walter Catlett. The importance of well done bits to the sum total of a production is strongly developed by E. E. Clive as a hack driver and Billy Gilbert as a lunch counter proprietor. And for the first time I could understand every word uttered by Stepin Fetchit. That means he is highly amusing.

Twentieth Century gave the picture an ambitious production without over-building it to the point of dwarfing the story, and Lucien Andriot's photography beautifully realizes all its pictorial possibilities. Irving Berlin gives the world half a dozen bits of music destined to attain wide popularity. The few dance numbers are presented attractively by Seymour Felix. The outstanding feature of the story and song and dance interpolations is that we are given just enough of everything. As you leave the theatre, you will not feel cheated, even though you may feel you could have stood quite a lot more of it.

Dobbin Has His Day

BREEZING HOME, Universal picture. Directed by Milton Carruth; associate producer, Edmund Grainger; original story by Finley Peter Dunne, Jr., and Philip Dunne; screen play, Charles Grayson; photographer, Gilbert Warrenton, A.S.C.; art direction, Jordon Otterson; associate, Loren Patrick; film editor, Otis Garrett; musical director, Charles Previn; music, Jimmy McHugh; lyrics, Harold Adamson; special effects, John P. Fulton; sound supervisor, Homer G. Tasker. Cast: William Gargan, Binnie Barnes, Wendy Barrie, Raymond Walburn, Alma Kruger, Alan Baxter, William Best, Michael Loring.

A NICE little picture about a race horse, Bill Gargan and Wendy Barrie, all three of whom give good account of themselves. The theme of the story is developed so consistently in Charles Grayson's screen play based on the original by the two Dunnes, that the whole thing practically amounts to a technical exposition of the horse-racing game. Certainly its appeal is limited to those who take an interest in the sport. There is a romance, of course, but it is merely an incidental element, secondary in importance to the physical welfare and the success on the course of a gallant looking racehorse who really is the hero of the story. I doubt the wisdom of gratuitously

limiting the appeal of a story by stressing the theme and neglecting the human element. Interest in racehorses is not universal, and it is the universality of the story's appeal which determines a picture's box-office value. Only one incident in the story will provoke criticism by those who know the horse racing game. When the odds against the horse hero are twenty-five to one, Raymond Walburn bets \$750 on him at even money. Walburn is characterized as a good natured ass, but even an ass cannot put quite that much strain on our credulity.

B_{REEZING} HOME is one of the class B pictures which Universal announces it will discontinue making. In entertainment value it is considerably above the average class B product. For one thing, it has a horserace which in real life would set a grandstand crazy with excitement. The director and the technicians who made the shots are entitled to credit for giving us some stirring entertainment. All the way through, the direction is first class. I cannot recall having seen Milton Carruth's name before. If this is his first bit of direction, he is going places. William Gargan, to me one of the most pleasing leading men in pictures; Wendy Barrie, whom I liked better than ever before; Binnie Barnes, in another of the snooty roles she does so well; Alma Kruger, a gracious and talented matron, and William Best, a colored comedian, are thoroughly satisfactory in their several roles. Alan Baxter, a capable heavy, does not read his lines in the corner-of-the-mouth monotone he employed in former characterizations, the result being the best performance he has given.

In two places when the story is occupying our attention, Wendy Barrie sings songs to check its forward progress. The McHugh-Adamson songs are all right, and Wendy sings them quite nicely, but they should have been held for some picture they would help, not hinder.

One More of the Same

READY, WILLING AND ABLE, Warners production and release. Executive producer, Hal Wallis; associate producer, Sam Bischoff; directed by Ray Enright; assistant director, Lee Katz; screen play by Jerry Wald, Sig Herzig and Warren Duff; from story by Richard Macaulay; photography by Sol Polito; film editor, Doug Gould; art director, Carl Jules Weyl; gowns, Howard Shoup; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; lyrics and music by Johnny Mercer and Richard Whiting; musical numbers directed by Bobby Connolly. Cast: Ruby Keeler, Lee Dixon, Carol Hughes, Allen Jenkins, Louise Fazenda, Ross Alexander, Winifred Shaw, Hugh O'Connell, Teddy Hart, Addison Richards, Shaw and Lee, E. E. Clive, Jane Wyman, May Boley, Charles Halton, Adrian Rosley, Lillian Kemble Cooper, Barnett Parker. Running time, 87 minutes.

ONCE more we have the musical-dance film in which the harassed hero manages only at the last moment to raise the money that will raise the curtain on the show that positively is going to slay Broadway. Yes, you have guessed it: the heroine is instrumental in raising the money. For every one person who these days pays his way into a legitimate theatre, there are several thousand throughout the world who pay their way into film theatres. If the public's interest in the living theatre were great enough to justify the persistency of picture producers in their choice of the stage as story material for their screen productions, every town in the country would

have its own theatre. Hollywood has the notion that an elaborate dance number can fit into nothing except a backstage story; and it also is under the impression that Main Street cannot be given too much of Times Square. It is a disease which ultimately will wear off.

Ready, Willing and Able you will find to be mildly entertaining if you still can be entertained by a picture of the sort. For Hollywood its gaiety is dampened somewhat by the presence of the late Ross Alexander in the cast, the feeling of regret being accentuated by the fact that his performance is the best he gave the screen. It would have advanced him a long way toward stardom. The cute and cuddly Ruby Keeler, always one of my staunch favorites, is even more delightful than usual. Louise Fazenda contributes some excellent comedy, as does also Hugh O'Connell. Carol Hughes, Lee Dixon, Allen Jenkins, Winifred Shaw and Addison Richards also stand out.

Now we come to Allen Jenkins' hat. Louise, Ruby, Carol, O'Connell, Alexander and Jenkins compose a party having a dish of tea in Ruby's apartment. For the duration of the party Jenkins wears his hat. He plays an actors' agent, one of the ten percent fraternity. All through the sequence my thoughts were on the hat. Why did he keep it on his head? Was it to characterize all actors' agents as uncouth fellows unaware of the ordinary dictates of social usage? On the screen such action is more than a mere breach of rules of politeness; it is a distraction, an element that diverts the attention of the audience from the story significance of the scene, a gratuitous break in the continuity of audience interest in the story.

Warner Brothers provide the picture with the usual spectacular setting which is a feature of productions of the sort and it is photographed with Sol Polito's established artistic skill. The writers of the screen play are responsible for a connected narrative and some witty dialogue. Sam Bischoff, associate producer, supplied Ray Enright, always a dependable director, with a wealth of material to work with, and right nobly did Ray perform his task, giving us one of the best directed of the long series of such offerings.

It Will Irritate You

MAMA STEPS OUT, Metro production and release. Produced by John Emerson; directed by George B. Seitz; features Guy Kibbee, Alice Brady, Betty Furness and Stanley Morner; screen play by Anita Loos; from stage play by John Kirkpatrick; musical score by Edward Ward; songs by Chet Forrest and Bob Wright; photographed by Jackson Rose; film editor, George Boemler; assistant director, Walter Strohm. Supporting cast: Gene Lockhart, Edward Norris, Gregory Gaye, Ivan Lebedeff, Heather Thatcher, Mitchell Lewis, Anna Demetrio, Frank Puglia, Adrienne D'Ambricourt, Running time, 70 minutes.

METRO does the whole industry a service in demonstrating in this production the folly of loud dialogue. The story is a little older than most of the other old stories, but that is not a drawback. The only thing that counts on the screen is the manner in which a story is told. The cast of Mama Steps Out is composed of capable players, and they are seen against the backgrounds which have made both Metro and Cedric Gibbons famous for the attractiveness of the physical features of

their productions. Anita Loos turned in a conventional talkie script, making intelligent use of the comedy possibilities of the play by John Kirkpatrick. Dolly Tree saw to it that the women were gowned becomingly, and Jackson Rose shot the whole thing in a manner which realizes all its pictorial possibilities.

The story is a trivial one. The story of My Man Godfrey also is a trivial one. Most of the screen stories are trivial in that they deal with our trivial desires and disappointments, with petty things which are important because they happen to us. Their strength as story material lies in the fact that we can project ourselves into them and live over again experiences we have had. Thus is our sympathy for the characters established, and it is sustained as long as we can approve the reactions of the characters to the situations in which they find themselves. Here we have a story which invites our sympathy for Guy Kibbee, as the husband of Alice Brady who yearns for contact with the culture and traditions of Europe. The locale is the French Riviera.

UNFORTUNATELY, the comic possibilities of the story are submerged in a vocal uproar; our aural sense is affronted by a sustained barrage of loud dialogue. The mission of any dramatic offering is to create in us a desire, and then to grant it. The greatest desire Mama Steps Out arouses is that the players should shut up and give our ears a rest. The desire is not granted. Kibbee, with whom we should sympathize by virtue of his being married to a silly, flighty woman, reads his lines in a loud monotone, utterly devoid of expression, until our sympathy goes to his wife for having to live with him. His voice is an irritating element all the way through the film. And there are others in the cast who offend in the same manner. There is none of the ordinary conversations which make screen dialogue convincing.

In one scene Betty Furness sighs, and we hear the sigh, thus establishing the fact of the microphone's ability to bring faint sounds to us. But that scene apparently meant nothing to the producers when they saw and heard it in the daily rushes; they let Kibbee and the others go on their howling way until what could have been an amusing comedy becomes only an irritation. The good things in it are not worth the price of admission when you have to buy annoyance with your ticket. All I carried away from it was the desire to see more of the comedy of Heather Thatcher and Gregory Gaye.

Florey in Fine Form

OUTCAST, Paramount release of Emanuel Cohen production. Features Warren William, Karen Morley and Lewis Stone. Directed by Robert Florey; screen play by Doris Malloy and Dore Schary; original story, Frank R. Adams; photographed by Rudolph Maté; assistant director, Earl Rettig; art director, Wiard Ihnen; film editor, Ray F. Curtiss; musical arrangements, Ernst Toch; musical direction, George Stoll. Supporting cast: Jackie Moran, Esther Dale, John Wray, Christian Rub, Virginia Sale, Ruth Robinson, Murray, Kinnell, Jonathan Hale, Richard Carle, Frank Melton, Lois Wilde, Tommy Jackson, Matthew Betz, Harry Woods, George Magrill, Dick Alexander. Running time, 73 minutes.

THE camera is a potent instrument in a picture directed by Robert Florey. He brings to the screen much of the rich pictorial quality which the better European direc-

tors strive for and are so successful in attaining. For Outcast he was fortunate in having behind the camera such an expert craftsman as Rudolph Maté. Maté's realization of Florey's composition conceptions, his mastery of shadows and subdued lighting, do much more for the production than merely their contribution to its visual attractiveness. In his photography Florey does not strive for beauty. The establishment and sustaining of mood are his objectives. Outcast opens with a shot of Jonathan Hale as a judge presiding at a murder trial. The camera looks up at him and gets a scene which suggests the majesty of the law, the dignity which surrounds its administration, the respect we should feel for it. Thus is the mood of the picture set at the beginning, and throughout it is sustained consistently by intelligent display of unity of photographic and story elements.

Outcast is a gripping drama with the same basic theme as that of Maid of Salem—distorted mob psychology, the power for evil of ignorance wedded to prejudice. Warren William, a noted surgeon, is spurned by his profession even though acquitted of murder of a patient by neglect; finally finds his way to a small village and there resumes his practice. He operates on Jackie Moran (a clever boy), the son of Esther Dale and John Wray; Miss Dale, an ignorant, dynamic woman, interferes; the boy dies just as the village learns of William's past record; he is accused of having murdered the boy; a mob assembles to hang him.

ALL this tragic drama is developed powerfully by Florey's effective direction. When he first came to this country from Europe, the first thing he did here prompted me to predict in these pages that his career as a director would be a brilliant one, but Florey never seems to have been given the chance I would have given him if I were a producer. He has directed only the smaller pictures to which adherence to shooting schedules is deemed to be of more importance than the full development of their entertainment possibilities. Everything he has brought to the screen reveals a genius capable of great accomplishments, but the film business is such a weird one his genius is not recognized by those who could profit by it.

Florey tells his story with graphic progression which does not allow our attention to wander for a moment. He blends the performances into it until we have no feeling we are looking at players enacting parts. Warren William gives what is by long odds his most convincing screen characterization. Lewis Stone, a grand performer always, is even more than usually impressive. Miss Dale, Wray, Christian Rub and Karen Morley are in every way satisfactory. The screen play of Doris Malloy and Dore Schary is competent screen writing, a script which sticks strictly to its business of telling its story without wandering around to embrace incidents not related to it. Consistently and dramatically it develops the theme of the story.

It Is a Sorry Mess

SEA DEVILS, an Edward Small production, RKO release. Directed by Ben Stoloff; screen play by Frank Wead, John Twist and P. J. Wolfson; photographed by J. Roy Hunt, A.S.C., and Joseph August, A.S.C.; special effects by Vernon Walker, A.S.C.; art di-

rector, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Sidney Ullman; musical director, Roy Webb; costumes by Edward Stevenson; set dressing by Darrell Silvera; recorded by John L. Cass; edited by Arthur Roberts; technical adviser, Lieut. H. C. Moore; assistant director, Kenny Holmes. Cast: Victor McLaglen, Preston Foster, Ida Lupino, Donald Woods, Helen Flint, Gordon Jones, Pierre Watkin, Murray Alper, Billy Gilbert, Barbara Pepper.

BECAUSE the script tells him he has to do it, Victor McLaglen begins to hate Preston Foster before he sees him. Sea Devils is dedicated to the Coast Guard Patrol, a foreword giving us the impression that the purpose in making it was to let the public know more about the force which does such heroic work when storms force ships on our rocky shores. We presume RKO make the necessary research and we can accept the picture as an authentic presentation of the service. I, for one, was glad to get such knowledge, as I never before was given an opportunity to get an intimate glimpse of the Coast Guard young men when at work and play. Taking RKO's word for it therefore, we learn these things about this important branch of U. S. government service:

A chief Boatswain's Mate in the Coast Guard Patrol is a vulgar lowbrow who uses his position to vent his personal hate for a man whom he began to hate the first time he heard him on the radio; a man in a U. S. uniform who parades through a saloon to the private quarters of the woman who owns it and wheedles money out of her; a man who, to vent his spite, perjures himself when testifying at a courtmartial, who gets beastly drunk and resigns from the service for some reason I was too bored to get. He is the man who motivates the story, the story is dedicated to the brave men of the service, therefore we may accept this portrait as reflecting RKO's conception of its personnel.

ASSUMING we are right so far, we must accept the whole thing as an authentic document. Our next step, therefore would be to petition congress to do something to raise the standard of the service, to make it a greater credit to the flag it serves. Further research, however, probably would reveal that RKO's portrait is distorted somewhat. So let us get back to the Sea Devils.

Edward Small, its producer, spent a lot of RKO money in demonstrating that he should be in some other business. The production does not reveal one spark of cinematic knowledge. Preston Foster, an excellent actor with a pleasing personality, is the hero of the romance. He is characterized as an irritating ass whom a nice girl like Ida Lupino, who ultimately marries him, would not tolerate for a moment. The audience will want her to marry the fine, upstanding and pleasing Donald Woods, but McLaglen's hatred of Foster results in Wood's death. That is the kind of story Small gives us as screen entertainment. There is not a convincing moment in it. At RKO's disposal are people who know how to make motion pictures, who could spend its money in a manner which would prove profitable to it, and who with their eyes shut and both arms tied to their backs, could not turn out such a sorry mess as Sea Devils, but RKO does not seem to be aware of it.

Notable Direction

NOBODY'S BABY, Metro release of Hal Roach picture. Directed by Gus Meins; original story and screen play by Harold Law, Hal Yates and Pat C. Flick; photographed by Norbert Brodine; sound recorded by W. B. Delaplain; film editor, Ray Snyder; art direction, Arthur I. Royce; settings, W. L. Stevens; photographic effects by Roy Seawright; music by Marvin Hatley, with lyrics by Walter Bullock; dances staged by Roy Randolph; musical arrangements by Jimmy Grier. Cast: Patsy Kelly, Lyda Roberti, Lynne Overman, Robert Armstrong, Rosina Lawrence, Don Alvarado, Tom Dugan, Orrin Burke, Dora Clemant, Laura Treadwell, Tola Nesmith, Florence Roberts, Si and his orchestra, The Rhythm Rascals and The Avalon Boys. Running time, 76 minutes.

Reviewed by Allan Hersholt

In this we are given a generouus quantity of amusing comedy of the farcical sort. Unimpressive from the production standpoint, decidedly the opposite so far as direction is concerned, weak in its narrative and satisfactory in its performances, Nobody's Baby merits recommendation to those in search of laugh-provoking entertainment—to those who do not mind having a screen comedy unfold with dialogue as its principal story-teller.

The picture moves swiftly. A glance at the names of its cast will reveal that it has a group of players skilled in the art of providing amusement, and none of them gives a performance which is at any moment inadequate.

Three or four years ago I viewed a two-reel Hal Roach offering that directorially pleased me to such an extent I acquired the conviction that someday its director, Gus Meins, would gain recognition as one of the industry's finest comedy makers. Nobody's Baby is his most recent effort, and it is due mainly to Meins' notable work that the production achieves the success it does. Considerably strengthened is my conviction about this director.

Baby is built to create laughs and it succeeded in doing this with the preview audience. As I viewed it, however, my disposition to laugh was checked somewhat by my reflection that it contains ideal material for the construction of a motion picture farce, yet Roach supplied the talkie treatment to it. The whole story is told in dialogue. It could have been unfolded to much better advantage had a motion picture script been provided.

Patsy Kelly and Lyda Roberti work well together and it is expected that the teaming of the two will prove commercially successful. A more or less withered orchid to those responsible for the songs and dances featured in *Baby*, which, however, possesses some good photography by Norbert Brodine.

Harmed by Its Comedy

BULLDOG DRUMMOND ESCAPES, Paramount picture and release. Directed by James Hogan; associate producer, Stuart Walker; from a story by H. C. (Sapper) McNeile and Gerard Fairlie; screen play by Edward T. Lowe; art direction by Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; edited by William Shea; sound by Gene Merritt; musical direction by Boris Morros; costumes designed by Travis Banton; interior decoration by A. E. Freudeman; photographed by Victor Milner. Cast: Ray Milland, Sir Guy Standing, Heather Angel, Reginald Denny, Porter Hall, Fay Holden, E. E. Clive, Walter Kingsford, Patrick Kelly, Charles McNaughton, Clyde Cook, Frank Elliott, David Clyde, Doris Llovd. Running time, 66 minutes.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

THIS one is remarkable in many ways. It is an anachronism, offering the type of appeal that made Hol-

lywood famous twenty years ago. Fundamentally, Bull-dog Drummond Escapes is sound cinema. Its weakness lies entirely in its exaggeration. James Hogan, director, striving for the last drop of suspense, has burlesqued his action, reducing the sinister mood to unintentional comedy. Had he used restraint, allowing his villains less nastiness, fewer funny faces, and had made them normal persons instead of bogey men, Bulldog Drummond would have been tops in entertainment.

Even as it is, this film will draw big money if it is sensibly released; shown at small-town theatres and particularly at kid matinees, it will give sure-fire results. At any odds, Edward T. Lowe's adaptation of the original by H. C. McNeille and Gerard Fairlie, is excellent, building a rising suspense with a nerve-jerking climax. With superb editing by William Shea and equally fine production, Paramount's reputation for technical excellence is maintained.

Ray Milland is competent in the lead and works hard for his first feature rating. Sir Guy Standing seems, at times, to be self-conscious, but his ability is evident. Heather Angel is her own sweet self, Reginald Denny is tops, as usual, and E. E. Clive gets the vote for the outstanding performance. Porter Hall's villainy is believable, and the long cast responds capably to Hogan's efforts to develop comedy.

Alison Skipworth Scores

TWO WISE MAIDS, Republic picture and release. Leonard Fields, associate producer; directed by Phil Rosen; screen play by Sam Ornitz; from original story by Endre Bohem; photographed by Ernest Miller; film editor, Ernest Nims; Murray Seldeen, supervising editor; musical supervision by Harry Grey; sound recorded by Terry Kellum. Cast: Alison Skipworth, Polly Moran, Hope Manning, Donald Cook, Jackie Searl, Lila Lee, Luis Alberni, Maxie Rosenbloom, Marcia Mae Jones, Harry Burns, Clarence Wilson, Selmer Jackson, John Hamilton, Theresa Conover, Raymond Brown, James C. Morton, Stanley Blystone, Bob McClung. Running time, 70 minutes.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

AN old story, a not particularly strong plot brought to vivid life by the masterful touch of a consummate artist. Alison Skipworth makes Two Wise Maids a gleaming bit of wisdom. Motivating and dominating the entire filmic flow, this movie veteran breathes her pungent personality into the somewhat threadbare idea of the old school teacher whose kindly savoir faire both endears her to her pupils and gets her into trouble.

Despite its bromidic kernel, Sam Ornitz has done a generally workmanlike script of Endre Bohem's original, and had he eliminated the typical Hollywood touches (siren-tooting cops escorting kids in stolen cars to save our heroine), his job might be pronounced excellent. In compensation, however, we are given, with one exception, uniformly convincing portrayals, with a really swell job of direction by Phil Rosen. Mr. Rosen and Miss Skipworth are an unbeatable team.

Particularly outstanding in the sturdy cast is the splendid work of Marcia Mae Jones. Its sincerity and depth brought a spontaneous burst of applause from the preview audience. On the other hand, I was mildly disappointed in Polly Moran. Her portrayal lacked sincerity; perhaps I had better say she seems ill-adapted to her role.

With competent production by Nat Levine, and efficiency throughout, Two Wise Maids is admission-price value for its direction and for the magnificent characterization by Alison Skipworth.

Color Complicates It

WINGS OF THE MORNING, 20th-Fox release of New World Pictures, Ltd., production. Robert T. Kane, producer; directed by Harold Schuster; screen play by Tom Geraghty; from stories by Donn Byrne; Natalie Kalmus, color director; Ray Rennahan, director of Technicolor photography; music arranged by Arthur Benjamin; W. Ralph Brinton, art director; costumes by Rene Hubert; Henry Imus and Jack Cardiff, cameramen; James Clark, film editor. Cast: Henry Fonda, Anabella, Leslie Banks, John McCormack, D. J. Williams, Philip Sydney Frost, Stewart Rome, Irene Vanbrugh, Harry Tate, Helen Haye, Teddy Underdown, Mark Daly, Sam Livesey, E. V. H. Emmett, Capt. R. C. Lyle, Steve Donoghue. Running time, 90 minutes.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

THIS English-Irish Twentieth Century release offers the student of cinema a fertile study-text. It graphically exemplifies the virtues and weaknesses of color; it goes further: Wings of the Morning is a beautiful mixture—but not a filmic blend. It is a well-knit story and a travelogue, in the same footage.

The two media of filmic expression are dove-tailed art-fully, however, each being used to give emphasis to the other. For example, the breath-taking beauty of an Irish country-side, painting-like in its isolated perfection, forms a fitting, if distracting, background for the love-story of an Irish earl and a Gipsy princess. The scenes are exquisite, and we would enjoy them more if we were not attempting to rivet our attention on the story. The plot itself is refreshingly picquant, but loses considerable vitality through the strain color imposes on its reality-illusion.

This significant fact is strikingly evidenced in that when a purely scenic shot is shown, the color is definitely an esthetic aid in establishing a direct visual appreciation of the scene's inherent beauty; it is real, and no illusion is needed. But when an emotional sequence comes on, demanding emotional reciprocation of the audience, color dulls the fine edge of imaginary intimacy. The human equation becomes top-heavy.

THIS sharp difference between the media gives Wings of the Morning a definite unbalance and lack of rhythm. Naturally there is an evanescent "wheels within wheels" impression which eliminates the necessary totality of effect. Despite that fact, the story itself is so captivating, and the camera effects so forceful, that Wings of the Morning is destined for encompassing popularity.

Speaking of performances, Wings of the Morning has nothing else but. Marie, played by Annabella, is a gleaming jewel. Annabella herself is the sweetest girl ever; the kind of young lady we dream about. Irene Vanbrugh's interpretation of Marie, grown old, is a fitting supplement to Annabella's queenly performance. Our own Henry Fonda gives us his uniformly sincere work, adding immensely to the story-appeal.

Stewart Rome is corking; his likable personality captures the sympathy of his audience immediately. The

cast functions as a smooth, precisely tuned machine, giving us as fine an example of histronic unity as Hollywood's best could offer. The addition of a brief, logically introduced appearance by John McCormack adds the zest of a further touch of reality to the atmosphere.

Given superb production by Robert T. Kane, and sensitively human direction by Harold Schuster, Wings of

the Morning is bound to win applause.

Not What It's Supposed to Be

TIME OUT FOR ROMANCE, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by Malcolm St. Clair; associate producer, Milton H. Feld; screen play by Lou Breslow and John Patrick; original story by Eleanore Griffith and William Rankin; photography, Robert Planck, A.S.C.; art direction, Lewis Creber; assistant director, Jasper Blystone; film editor, Al De Gaetano; costumes, Herschel; sound, George Leverett and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Claire Trevor, Michael Whalen, Joan Davis, Chick Chandler, Douglas Fowley, Bennie Bartlett, William Griffith, William Demarest, Lelah Tyler, Andrew Tombes, Georgia Caine, Vernon Steele, Inex Courtney, George Chandler, Fred Kelsey.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

If I had not seen this film at least a dozen times in one form or another I doubtless would think it very clever. But ever since It Happened One Night, it has been happening ever since. Time Out For Romance has none of the genuine sparkle and very little of the entrancing rhythm of its inspired predecessor; like most copies, it caught the form but lost the inner glow. By this I do not mean to infer that Time Out For Romance is a poor picture. Judged by the queer standards set for class B's, it holds up its end of the program admirably. It is merely unfortunate that Time Out For Romance so definitely suggests the Gable-Colbert classic—that comparison is inevitable.

But despite the weak adaptation by Lou Breslow and John Patrick, the story by Eleanore Griffith and Wm. Rankin has moments of sheer humor. Clair Trevor is largely responsible for it, giving us a thoroughly cute and convincing picture of the pampered petite who can get her man just as competently as her less elegant and more primitive sister-huntresses. And by the way, this Time Out For Romance convinces me that Fox is grooming Michael Whalen for a grab at Clark Gable's position. In a recent version of White Fang he did everything and wore everything Gable used in his dog-and-snow picture. Michael tries again in Romance and does a business-like job of it; but, nice as he is, he is still Michael Whalen. Sometime Producer Milton H. Feld should let him play Michael Whalen. It would be a lot more convincing.

AND speaking of things convincing, the direction of Malcolm St. Clair is tops. Given a weakly plotted story, he has utilized every opportunity for playing up the personalities of his cast. Along with Miss Trevor, he literaly holds the story up by his clever touches. But despite his heroic labor, the thin spots show through. Andrew Tombes, for instance, is robbed of opportunity he would have skilfully exploited had the plot been logically concluded. Humor is ladeled out in indiscriminate splashes; but so cleverly does Joan Davis do it, and so deftly does

Chick Chandler foil it, that we forget its occasional irrelevance.

Comparable to Happened One Night is the smoothly uniform support. Although selection for special comment is difficult, I think little Bennie Bartlett deserves a vote for his vivid bit. In summary then, if you can forget that Time Out For Romance is a take-off on a vastly better picture, you will come away pleased with your box-office investment.

Cinematic Pulse

By Paul Jacobs

FOLLOWING up our discussion of originality in the last issue of the Spectator, let us see for ourselves the reasons behind the dearth of fresh ideas in films. At the root of this trouble is the fact that it is thoroughly human to follow the line of least resistance. It is easier to envisualize life in terms of accepted ideas. For example, it is difficult for the producer, who is accustomed to thinking in terms of previous films, to project his mind into the purely analytical—to realize that originality is a matter of merely re-interpreting the usual and accepted; a matter of finding the new meaning, or of attempting a more clear and basic envisualization.

But the trouble goes deeper than simple laziness. It lies far beneath the threshold of conscious thought, finding its roots in the fundamental reflexes of the human machine. In short, it is a reflection of the universal desire for success without effort. From it springs the endless films which concern themselves over the girl who seeks and achieves the rich boy; or the many "sudden success" stories which tell us about the boy who suddenly gets his chance and comes through; perhaps he is a singer, or a dancer, but whatever his forte, he steps from his desire, directly into fulfillment, without the intervening vears of effort.

Now, these ideas are all right, in themselves, but they are so universally prevalent in our sub-conscious, that almost everyone writes about them or suggests them. What I am getting at is this: The writer or producer finds an appreciative chord in himself, toward these wornout ideas; in consequence, they are written constantly, and, for the same underlying reason that makes them acceptable, they are written without the rejuvenating effects of original handling; it is a vicious circle. The something-for-nothing idea reflects itself in the treatment.

For example, the Cinderella story is chosen, and the writer begins. In keeping with the something-for-nothing principle, the writer weakens his story by using coincidence in solving the story problem, because it is easier than figuring out a logical opportunity for the hero to solve it. Or, he injects comedy stuff to cover up the thinness of plot. Here, too, is the reason character delineation is so often weak, and why character-complication stories so often are phoney. It is easier to allow the story movement to follow the same old track than it is to work out the story-logic by thoughtful deliberation.

SEEKING further, we see that this same, idea-deteriorating source is responsible for the unfortunate attitude many producers have toward modernization and sensible story-supply methods. They are making money, they pay themselves in proportion to what they feel their abilities are worth—and yet, because it is easier to do and think and accept whatever has already been done and thought and accepted, they continue to disregard the magnificent potentialities which glitter and beckon from the vast, virgin fields of cinema exploitation. They are making money; and it is easier to repeat themselves than to spend the effort necessary to make every film a success.

With the tremendous, but wasted resources at their command, by the intelligent application of cino-dramatic law, every picture can embody the ingredients of audienceinterest; and every picture could bring in double its present rate of return. But they naturally, and humanly, prefer to get something for nothing; or, at least, to get their comfortable returns for the least possible effort. That they can easily double it, or that they owe the public the best possible for the incredible sums they receive, escapes them. This reaction is as utterly human as the one we have been discussing. Later, we shall apply it further.

WIDENING our analytical scope, we immediately are aware that the whole Hollywood fabric is cut from this same cloth. Something for the least effort. Hollywood is the only industry that does not systematically perpetuate itself. The old-time lumbermen had the same idea; they chopped down every tree without replanting, because it was costly to replant. In the long run, their way proved much more costly. Today, every industry has its specialized schools, from which recruits are selected as they are needed. Practically the only school for Hollywood personnel are rackets for fleecing the would-be screen writer, director, etc. Public schools are just beginning to help in a ponderous, academic way. But Hollywood proper, the source of this need, will have nothing to do with it, nothing to offer. It is easier that way. Hollywood recruits its staff in the craziest, most illogical manner concievable. Something for the least amount of effort.

Again narrowing our focus to the specific, our new understanding throws light upon most silly Hollywood practices, many of which draw almost universal criticism. Among them is the preposterous habit of "typing" players. An excellent actor does a convincing characterization of

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an idiot. From that time on, he gets a call only when the producer wants an idiot. For example, a charming and talented friend of mine made a tremendous success in her first starring role, by her deeply intelligent portrayal of a half-human creature from the nether world. She broke her contract, and probably ruined her film career, because the producer immediately decided that her life must be devoted to horror parts. His decision was an up-welling of the same source we have been discussing. Her first job was excellently done. It was easier to give her what he knew she could do than to experiment in the hope of finding her genius capable of versatility.

THIS same human weakness has a more subtle mode of expression. Whenever anyone reacts to some circumstance in a manner he knows to be illogical but pleasant (that is to say, more easy), he explains away his action to himself by what psychologists call "rationalization." It is a subconscious self-justification, in which he soon comes to believe his self-offered justifications. Thus, the type of producer we have been discussing eventually is sincere in his preposterously unbusiness-like ideas. In this manner he convinces himself, for example, that the public really wants these worn-out ideas, that to change his bromidic treatment of stories would be disastrous.

Five Per Cent

By James Brant

A New Yorker expressed the opinion that the story rated five per cent of the box-office value of a finished motion picture production and he was backed up by a Hollywooder who should have known better and probably does. Let us see whether this New Yorker and this Hollywooder are two Solomons of motion picture production and exhibition, or whether they are just a couple of cockeyed crystal-seers.

By analogy and comparison is one good way to determine the worth and value of any commodity in relation to the worth and value of any other commodity. The same method holds good in rating individuals. According to the two Solomons, the story, and therefore the originator, inventor or writer, rates five per cent of the gross

commercial value of a motion picture, which is a poor way to estimate its worth because the real value of any commodity is determined by the net profits from its manufacture and distribution.

According to their reasoning, Steinmetz, deceased, rated a piker in the development of General Electric because, forsooth, he was only a common underling who conceived new ideas and worked them into finished forms of great commercial value. He was, however, not so rated by the stockholders and officials of General Electric.

A writer, not under any consideration a mere wordmechanic, capable of inventing new and different ideas of drama and new and different method of protrayal, bears exactly the same relation to the success of a motion picture as an inventive electrical engineer bears to the success of an electric manufacturing company.

ANOTHER comparison is in the building of an ocean liner. The exact method pursued in such construction is not so very important; the general method used in similar construction will be plenty good enough. A greyhound of the ocean is conceived in the mind of a single individual, an inventive naval architect. By study and reflection he selects his ideas and shapes them into form until he has a complete mind's eye picture of the finished vessel. A corps of assistants, specialists in various lines, takes his ideas and works them into constructive form under his supervision and direction.

The plans are drafted and the specifications are drawn. Details are furnished for important items of construction. The whole layout is checked, rechecked and checked again and again for possible slips. The shipbuilding corporation starts construction. The manager of that corporation does not build that vessel according to his own notion of what and how it should be. He follows plans and specifications to the last item and to the last decimal point five figures, unless by agreement with the architect a change is found advisable.

The director of a motion picture production corresponds with the manager of the shipbuilding corporation, and the writer, or designer, or inventor of the photodrama corresponds with the naval architect. Production under such conditions would involve no curtailment of imagination in the director, but would rather afford him greater

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opportunity to show and prove his ability and his work-

manship.

It should be apparent that a mere story teller is not necessarily a dramatist nor is a dramatic writer necessarily a photodramatist. The proper designation for one capable of designing a motion picture in its entirety might be Drama Architect, Screen Architect, Motion Picture Architect, or any other term conveying the thought of inventive designing.

T also follows that such a one, to be of the most value to production, should have in rather sizable quantity practical sense and executive ability. That kind of an individual would surely rate better than five per cent.

Some centuries ago there were a number of stage dramas written by a man named William Shakespeare. Because within them were a fine quality of sentiment, a penetrating wordly wisdom and a beauty of expression, those dramas have lived and will continue to live as long as the English language exists, and the name Shakespeare will live with them. Just who remembers the actors and actresses and the stage directors of that time and who cares about them? They did not amount to as much as one of Shakespeare's sonnets so far as permanency is considered.

Whenever and wherever there comes into productive activity an individual who combines within himself an inventive mind, a practical business sense and an organizing executive ability, his completed work stands out as a monument to his achievement and that will prove to be true in motion pictures if such an individual should ever become active in that industry.

The next best thing is an organizing executive, an inventive writer or designing photodramatist or screen architect and a production manager, all of the first class. In a producing organization of that kind the whole play, to the last detail, would be on paper before even a move was made towards production. The play in complete form would stand out as a finished picture to any one who had the mental capacity to see it. There would be a better selection of plays and better plays produced at a low minimum cost and they would undersell, outsell and outdraw the present run-of-mine motion picture productions, for a tremendous profit.

HAT remains true in spite of what seems to be the prevailing notion that motion pictures are an art set apart and exempt from the usual and customary methods of building, manufacture and construction. The production and exhibition of motion pictures are, at this time, strictly a business proposition, established and continued as a commercial enterprise for the sole purpose of making money, and as such are subject to the same common sense principles that apply to other lines of business.

Common sense indicates that any corporation before, not after, but before, it spends or invests its capital, surplus or income, should know how much money it is going to put out, where it is going to go, for what purpose, the percentage of success or failure and the probable percentage of profit.

It is difficult to understand just how a motion picture

producer can estimate, along the lines just indicated, the cost and profit of a photoplay without complete, definite and exact plans and estimates before construction work is started.

In the personnel of an organization that could furnish such information, there would be one whose work would be of the very greatest value for the profitable operation of the business—the insignificant, yellow-coated, mangy five per cent pup of a designing dramatist.

Readers Write

Mary Is a Bright Girl

Since it seems to suddenly be the thing to do, let me add my bit of praise. I am not a critic, or any such person, but I like Mr. Beaton's comments and I have learned a great deal from them. I think the reviews are especially good and very clever. I am 14 years old, and in my second year at high school.—Mary Richards, Omaha, Neb.

For the Forgotten Ones

In reading your issue of January 30, I was greatly interested in the two articles on the forgotten actor and actress (reviews on We're on the Jury and Maid of Salem)—Louise Dresser and Victor Moore being given a chance to please the theatre-going

public again.

Certainly such people who have given their very best to the theatre and picture industry should be given opportunities and credits, as your article indicates. To my way of thinking, and surely to many others, the most pitiful thing is the shabby treatment accorded the actor and actress in Hollywood that have, as I say, given splendidly to the advancement of the picture industry of themselves. There are so many allowed to be idle and yet the studios keep crying for talent, searching for it, and all the while it is right here in their front yard.

As another example, I have Eddie Quillan in mind. For a number of years producers could always count on Eddie in the box-office in the marvelous comedies he has made, then they apparently forgot him. About a year ago they gave this comedian a dramatic part in Mutiny on the Bounty and the criticisms he received from one end of the country to the other, in the press, for this work were equal to any received by anyone in the cast. From the critics, the public, the exhibitors and all, came many expressions of satisfaction in seeing this young man again on the screen and, going so far as to state that from now on he should never have an idle moment. Yet, what has happened? The producers continue to ignore him. Why not have an Academy Award for the most neglected and forgotten talent of the year?

In any other business such talent and ability are recognized by promotion. Why does the moving picture industry persist in thinking that they can ignore such principles of fairness and acknowledgement of an employee's ability? As one of the theatre-going public that pays the price at the box-office, I feel we are entitled to more consideration from the industry, rather than being subjected to the trash that we have to pay our money for and to spend our time hunting so hard for good, clean entertainment.—R. M. Buck, Los Angeles.

She Seems to Like Us

I am happy to be able to say that the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR is, in my opinion, outstandingly the best magazine in its field. I say this not without knowledge. For the past year I have been student editor of our dramatics department. And I have read every such publication on the market. My teacher agrees with me too.—Doris McCullough, Philadelphia.

WHEN pictures were silent, people patronized them as a matter of habit. The habit will not be restored until the entertainment value of class B product is raised far above the present level.

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HER HUSBAND'S SECRETARY * WHEN'S YOUR BIRTHDAY?
MICHAEL STROGOFF * MURDER GOES TO COLLEGE

THE SCREEN INDUSTRY CAN SERVE ITSELF BEST BY SERVING SCREEN ART MORE



From the



Editor's Easy Chair

The Editor Is Asked to Explain

I have been in Hollywood for the past six months only, during which I have been a constant reader of your sometimes provocative but always entertaining and instructive SPECTATOR. I have found various references to the "illusion of reality," the differences between the stage and the screen, the harm done the screen by stage conventions and too much dialogue. Perhaps before I became one of your readers you dealt more exhaustively with these points, but not during the past six months have you gone into them comprehensively enough to give me a clear idea of what your views are based on. Why not, for me and other new readers, something that will brush away the cobwebs?—R. B.

R. assigns to me a lengthy task. Since the Spectator R. has made any comprehensive statement of its interpretation of the fundamentals of screen art, its army of readers has increased more than threefold, consequently I can imagine that many others share R. B's. desire for greater elucidation on various points which have been referred to but briefly during the last couple of years. All readers of the Spectator are aware it regards stage influence as a foreign invasion of the fundamentals of screen art, but the majority does not know what process of reasoning leads us to such conclusions. For new readers, and, I hope, with the indulgence of old ones, I will set down at length my argument for the defendant in Stage vs. Screen. It will take several Spectators, perhaps many, before the argument is concluded and the case handed to the jury.

First, we must agree upon the fundamentals of the two arts, discover how far the points they have in common penetrate into their separate and individual internals. Superficially, all arts are alike in their esthetic appeal, but they differ widely in their individual demands. To acquire a comprehensive grasp of the difference between the stage and the screen we first must analyze the elements of which both are composed.

W E have to reach back across a great many centuries to locate the birthday of the art of the spoken drama; and the nearest we can come to it then is to discover the time when it was grown up enough to attract the attention of the earliest historians. Down through all these centuries it has come to us with only such changes as the thought process of the people demanded.

Twenty-five centuries ago Greeks were entertained by tragedies, comedies and satirical farces, and today audiences are entertained in theatres by similar dramatic offerings. So leisurely was the development of the externals

of the art, it was not until late in the seventeenth century that scenery was introduced in England.

But however sound the art became, however definite its form and true its changes to meet the progressive demands of those who patronized it, it never became important commercially. The theatre never has been numbered among the imposing industries. It has built no factories, employed no armies of workmen.

As against the twenty-five centuries of the spoken drama we have less than half a century of the motion picture. Even before it assumed definite form as an art it grew to tremendous proportions as an industry. It made Hollywood a large city. It caused factories to be built to supply its wants. It employed armies of workmen, thousands of artists.

WHERE one theatre of the spoken drama stood a quarter of a century ago, a score of motion picture houses stand today. Tens of thousands of communities that never witnessed a stage play are entertained nightly by motion pictures. In a village high up in the Alps I sat in the open air one evening and viewed a motion picture that two years previously I had seen in a film palace on New York's Broadway.

In all industrial history there is no other development that matches the magic growth of the film industry. In the history of amusements there is nothing to match the instant acclaim the entire world accorded this new method of providing dramatic entertainment.

And still the stories the screen tells are much the same as Thespis told when he introduced the voice in dramatic offerings in Attica twenty-five centuries ago. Love and hate, passion, jealousy, ambition, fear, covetness, bravery, cowardice, integrity, infidelity—they are the elements that were mixed in Attica's yesterday as they are in Hollywood's today. Thespis used all the plots there are, and Hollywood has been unable to find a new one.

Then why is it that the spoken drama in all its centuries, merely sounded a minor note in our symphony of living, and the screen drama crashed so suddenly into the consciousness of the entire world? As the two were selling the same goods, we must assume that it was the package that put motion pictures over.

E can account for the greater popularity of the screen only on the ground that it must have an appeal the stage lacks. If they appealed equally, any given center of

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population would have as many theatres as it has picture houses. This morning's Los Angeles papers contain the announcements of eighty-six picture houses, and two theatres in which spoken drama is offered. It is evident, then, that the appeal of the two forms of entertainment must differ radically.

When we go to the theatre we are seeking intellectual entertainment. We sit in a world in front of the footlights and outside the proscenium arch, and rivet our attention on what is going on beyond them. When Leslie Howard appears as Hamlet, we are pleased or displeased by the manner in which he, the actor, plays the role; we listen to the brilliant lines of Shakespeare and are conscious of the beauty of their rhythm.

The employment of our intellects is necessary to the enjoyment of the play. Before we can sympathize with Hamlet and Ophelia, the lines they read must be referred to our intellects for interpretation, but by no stretch of imagination can we persuade ourselves we are looking at the real Hamlet and Ophelia. We are conscious all the time that whatever satisfaction we derive comes from our estimate of the proficiency of the artists playing the roles. In such a play as Hamlet it is the manner in which the lines are read that challenges our attention.

In the ordinary drama of today our attention is held by the manner in which the story is told in spoken words. Here again the appeal is to the intellect. The actors move about the stage and relate the plot to us, and we must listen attentively to permit our ears to convey the words to our intellects for digestion.

FROM the earliest days of the spoken drama there has been a little chap occupying a seat in the top row of the gallery, and every line spoken on the stage has to be enunciated clearly enough and loudly enough for him to hear it. The hero can not put his lips to the shell-like ear of the heroine and faintly whisper, "I love you!" as he would in real life. He would be cheating the little chap who paid good money for his lofty seat. He must project his voice to the farthest customer.

No matter how dramatic a line may be, no matter how heavily freighted with story value, it means nothing to our little chap unless he hears it. The necessity of making him hear it has forced the stage to develop a method of speaking that is all its own and which is heard only from behind footlights. So accustomed to it have we become, we take it as a starting point for our consideration of the degree of naturalness that marks a player's performance; we do not go back beyond it and start with the realization that his manner of speaking in itself is not natural, that he should not declare his love in tones loud enough to be heard by anyone except the object of his devotion.

The stage today boasts that it has left forensic ferocity behind it with other follies of its hoary youth, and has acquired a degree of naturalness that makes it more impressive; yet, if it ponders the matter frankly, it will have to admit that if it really acquired complete naturalness, half of what it says would not be heard by its audience.

If the little chap were on the stage with the hero and could look into his eyes as he leaned towards the heroine, it would not be necessary the line should be heard, as the devotion the eyes express in itself would be a declaration of love. But from his seat in the top gallery the little chap can not see the love that lurks in the lover's eyes, and it is only when he hears the line that he abandons all suspicion that the hero may be leaning forward for the purpose of asking the heroine what time it is.

We see, then, that the stage offers solely intellectual diversion, that whatever degree of naturalness we accord it is a concession on our part to our readiness to meet it half way and overlook its limitations. But we never went far enough to pour riches into its lap, to erect temples for it in every neighborhood, to build a city as its production center and provide it with a lot of swimming pools for three thousand-dollar-a-week young people. It was the screen we took to our hearts warmly enough to shower it with such evidence of our satisfaction.

Pictures have universal and elemental appeal and the earliest ones that primitive man etched on the face of clifts depicted motion. But it remained for the motion picture camera of to-day apparently to make them move. Actually no picture can be given motion, but the persistency of vision can impart the illusion of motion to a series of pictures exposed in quick success. The motion picture camera creates this impression.

HERE for the first time the world was given dramatic entertainment that did not rely upon the spoken word for clarity of expression, did not present complicated social problems to be argued in our presence. No longer did we have to sit on the edge of our seats and strain to catch each syllable of the villian's threat.

We just sat back in a darkened house, listened to music and looked at pictures. We entertained ourselves. We imagined the shadows on the screen were real people; we imagined the farmhouse in the distant background was farther from us than the girl in the foreground, when in reality, they were both on the same screen, just so many feet from the end of our noses. When we saw the lovers talking to one another, our imagination wrote the dialogue and created the sound of their voices.

And out of the pictures we fashioned stories to suit our several fancies. Grandfather attributed to the young people on the screen the thoughts, speech and emotions of those who were young when he was; mother translated the pictures into terms of her own adolescence, and little Sally applied to them the knowledge of life she had gained in her nine years of existence. Thus each member of the family was satisfied.

HERE was no straining to catch words, no appeal to the intellect. When the hero punched the villain on the chin, we did not say to ourselves, "He is punching him on the chin." We merely witnessed the deed and reacted to it emotionally, not intellectually. Thus the screen appealed directly to our emotions without the cooperation of our intellects, and we enjoyed a complete

intellectual rest, which made it ideal entertainment for those who had wrestled during the day with their various social and domestic problems.

And the absence of footlights and proscenium arch allowed us to enter the world of the characters who apparently moved upon the screen. To us they were not actors. Our imaginations made them real people with whom we rubbed elbows. We accompanied them upon their adventures no matter how far afield they travelled, thus making the illusion of reality complete. We looked into the eyes of the characters and read their emotions there; we did not have to hear the words they used to express their feelings.

Then came the talkies. Immediately preceding them there was a period of lassitude in picture house box-offices. It was interpreted in Hollywood as an indication that the public was growing weary of silent pictures. The truth was that the public was wearying of the kind of silent pictures it was getting.

HOLLYWOOD was satiated with the prosperity silent pictures had brought it. It grew indifferent. It lay down on its job and reduced picture making to an automatic grind. The wheels of the studios continued to turn, but the product became patternized; the same old stories were told over and over again until the dullest viewer could tell, before the first reel was half run, what was going to happen in the last.

Hollywood's thoughts were on the stock exchange more than upon its stages; its eyes more on the ticker tape than upon its winding film. Its indifference, reflected by its product, finally made the public indifferent and there was a serious lessening of revenue to maintain the elaborate structure the industry had built and pay the grotesque salaries the world envied.

Anyone familiar with the fundamentals of screen art knew that they were outraged by the introduction of the reality of dialogue into an art of the illusion of reality, but even one possessing such knowledge could not quarrel with the film industry for its wholesale surrender to the new medium while it was in the novelty stage. The mission of the industry is to make money, and the early talkies made so much that Hollywood lost its head and refused to recognize the fact that no market can be maintained by product with a flaw in it.

HOLLYWOOD built up a worldwide market by producing a form of entertainment that did not rely upon the spoken word, that did not require the exercise of the intellect, that was visual, that engaged the active co-operation of the imagination. By continuing to make talkies after their novelty wore off, it showed that it expected to hold that market with a product that relied almost wholly on the spoken word, that appealed solely to the intellect, that is aural, that leaves nothing to the imagination.

Every picture Hollywood makes to-day is another confession that it never has grasped the secret of its first great success. It is unaware that what it offered for sale, and what the world so eagerly bought, was an art form, a story-telling method unlike any other. If it had grasped

this fact, it would not have abandoned the form and used its cameras for photographing another form that in twenty-five centuries did not make one-hundredth of the impression on the world that its own form did in twenty-five years.

And when it used its camera to give us pictures of the art so foreign to its own, it used its microphone further to accentuate the difference between the two by bringing to the screen all the artificiality of the stage. It forgot the camera brought the little chap from his distant seat into the presence of the characters. Its stage actors thought he still was in the gallery and addressed their remarks to him there. It did not seem to be aware that the microphone could make the hero's whisper of devotion as intimate to the girl in the highest gallery seat as to the sweetheart by his side.

BY giving its product purely intellectual appeal, the film industry challenged the critical sense of those who supported it. Pleasing them with silent pictures was a comparatively simple matter, for each patron formed his own story from the pictures that moved across the screen. The talkies forced their stories on him.

Hollywood's complete abandonment of its own story-telling method as soon as it was given a device that enabled it to ape the stage, led it into the further error of seeking story material it could not use during its voiceless years. It turned its back on the simple stories that had made its appeal universal and went over almost wholly to material conceived for the stage. It convinced itself that at last it had grown up, and sacrificed its tremendous children audience to its conviction that only adult product fitted its new dignity.

My personal opinion is that the screen today can present stage plays better than the stage itself can present them. The camera can follow the story wherever it leads and does not have to make its characters converge to a limited number of sets, it can make more intimate scenes that are improved by intimacy, and enable its players to converse in natural tones. But it is not the mission of the screen to present stage plays. Its mission is to present motion pictures. I do not mean that it should make silent pictures again. There would be no sense in its remaining silent when it has a voice. But its voice should be used to supplement the camera, not, as it is used now, to supplant it.

(In the next Spectator we will discuss Entertainment, the reason we seek it, the effect it has on us, what we desire from it, and the different manners in which the stage and the screen respond to our desire.)

PICTURES today are made in the cutting rooms, not in sets or on location. A studio thinks nothing of shooting twice as much footage as the finished picture will contain. Such a thing as a perfect motion picture on paper is unheard of, yet no one can persuade me that it not only is not possible, but that it is not simple and practical. An enormous saving would be effected in all the studios if more intelligence were displayed in the preparation of scripts. A writer should know if a certain scene is

essential and a director should know how much footage it would consume, thus making the script a succession of essential scenes which would consume a known amount of footage. If there be too much footage, it could be brought to length in the script with more advantage to the finished production than if it were done in the cutting room. Of course, the argument is raised that inspiration must be allowed to function during shooting, an argument which architects might advance during construction to justify the erection of eight stories out of which a five-story building would be whittled.

AFTER a recent preview I saw Bob Taylor plow a way for himself and Barbara Stanwyck through a horde of autograph hunters, the determinedly negative shake of his head being his only response to their pleas for signatures. If all the victims of the autograph pest had as much sense as Taylor, an end would be put to it. The trouble is that the little people who are flattered by it, keep it alive and make the big ones, who are bored by it, stand the brunt of the attacks.

FROM Maxwell Aley, editor, Longmans, Green & Co., Publishers, New York, comes a letter which makes the Spectator editor's day complete. Mr. Aley tells me he is sending two books for me to review, and in course of his letter says: "I am deeply interested in the cinema as a great popular art—an art that is developing on a scale greater and with larger possibilities than any of the popular art forms of the past. Which brings me to the HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR. For a long time Ruth Aley has been at me to start reading its fortnightly issue, but being an eye-weary editor when night comes, I resisted. Finally about a month ago I started in on some old copies, and have now read you through from last August up to the present time. May I congratulate you on a fine job? I can sense how single-handed it has been, and I suspect that at times it has been very difficult. But you are doing something that much needed to be done, and doing it superbly. I applaud particularly your insistance on material being basically cinematographic, and then treated with cinema technique. The photographed novel or play is almost always bad—the play actually worse than the novel, for there is a closer relation between the novel and the cinema play in their basic forms. Inevitably such sound criticisms as yours will have an important effect on those who are actually making pictures. At the moment even the best of the directors are not entirely sure—they are like the earlier novelists, say the 18th Century novelists, who had just about everything but weren't completely in control of all of it. Congratulations again, and count me among your steadiest readers and certainly among your most appreciative."

A NOTE from Jimmie Fidler in reference to my comments in the last Spectator on his bantam-like strutting. "And bantam cockiness pays such nice dividends, too," writes Jimmie. It certainly does, and if I could approve his methods, I could congratulate him upon their results. Jimmie's value to his sponsor is demonstrated by the degree of interest the public displays in his broadcasts, the degree, in turn, being demonstrated by the num-

ber of letters he receives. Here are two facts facing the hardheaded Jimmie: If he says something nice about a screen person, few letters come in; if he says something nasty, his mail is enormous. When he can show his sponsor the enormous mail, the sponsor is satisfied Jimmie is a good investment, and when his contract expires he can get more money for signing a new one. Jimmie's note is a confession that he utters scathing criticisms only for revenue, leaving us to infer that he is more concerned in the revenue than in the justice of the comments which earn it. Well, that is one way of making money, and I suppose Jimmie has got past the point of blushing when he endorses his salary check. And I do not hold in great respect a sponsor who is satisfied to have his business advertised in company with a barrage of comments which produce results only when they are bitter and generally unjust to those who are made the victims of them. Seemingly the sponsor does not take into account the fact that as the bulk of Jimmie's mail comes from people who resent his remarks, it is logical that the product advertised should share in the resentment.

THE value of a heritage is the use which the inheritor makes of it. The late I in the makes of it. The late Irving Thalberg left the film industry a rich heritage when he designed The Good Earth, his parting gesture before his tired body sought eternal rest. What use will the film industry make of it? Will it profit by the lesson the great picture can teach it? It is the most enlightening example of the sound picture presented to the world since the screen became audible. It recognizes the camera's place in screen entertainment. It should revolutionize picture making in Hollywood, should lead Hollywood back to its real business, that of making motion pictures. Even when Irving was producing talking pictures which relegated the camera to a secondary place, he realized that dialogue was an infraction of the basic laws of the screen, that the camera was its only legitimate story-telling medium. He once told me he fully endorsed the Spectator's stand for recognition of the camera and that the screen finally would have to come to it. He heard the music of Shakespeare's lines in Romeo and Juliet and played it on the screen; he saw the emotional sway of The Good Earth and expressed it in the screen's own language. I feel Romeo and Juliet would have been his last all-talkie and his future productions would have been on The Good Earth pattern. It is a simple pattern in the use of which Hollywood was proficient before its senses succumbed to the noise it found it could make when the microphone injected poison in its veins. I am afraid to hope that The Good Earth will teach producers anything. It is the voice of a giant telling them what to do, a voice now stilled at its source though still speaking on the screen, but it is so hard for little people to understand giants and profit by what they say.

LETTING the mind go wandering: The first night KNX went on the air a dozen or so years ago, I stepped to the microphone and said, "This is KNX, the voice of Hollywood." This identification has been kept up ever since.... The postman delivers the mail at our new San Fernando Valley home at five o'clock in the

afternoon. I thought all postmen were in bed by that time.... A marquee reads: The First Baby, and So They Were Married. High time.... A horse and buggy have just driven past our place, a leaf of memory floating by on the country breeze.... During the frigid spell I experienced great difficulty in keeping my legs warm. ... Cousin Peg writes us from Toronto that she has become the mother of the fourth Noel Marshall in her husband's family. Her Noel was born on Christmas morning. Appropriate.... When your fountain pen is not in use, let it lie on its side and it always will be ready for instant service.... Bo Peep, Mrs. Spectator's Pekinese, pulls pins out of everything she can find them in. We can't keep these little lace dingbats on the arms of overstuffed chairs.... Our milkman gets up at two o'clock in the morning, has 208 customers and finishes his route at 8:30 a.m.... If all of us were worthy of the regard in which our dogs hold us, the world would be a better place.... Raymond Massey is being brought from England to play a part in a Selznick picture. When he arrives there will be one hundred and one people in Hollywood who could have played the part.... Each of these mental fragments is first recorded on the nearest piece of paper and once a month or so I find perhaps ten per cent of them and send them to the printer. Some of them go to the laundry, but it is a mystery how the other ones disappear. All the really brilliant ones never are found.... Quite dispassionately, without prejudice, not even remotely influenced by the fact of our relationship, I announce, state, aver and declare, Wendy, my two-year old granddaughter, to be the most beautiful, fascinating, adorable and bewitching child in the wide, wide world. She has taken a house in the Valley to be near her grandfather, and has moved in, bringing two dogs, two cats, two parents, one nurse and one canary. I'm on my way over to see her.

Dailly papers have it that Stokowski and perhaps a few other symphony orchestra leaders may develop into motion picture directors. Hasten the day! Once he gains a knowledge of screen fundamentals, Stokowski should rise to film heights comparable with those he reached in the musical world. Hollywood is wrong in its conviction that its mission is to photograph stage art. The screen and the stage have nothing in common, but there is affinity between the screen and music, as the Spectator long has maintained. The Good Earth is a symphony of movement, a visual tone poem, closely akin to music but far removed from the stage. The great motion picture directors of the future logically may be recruits from the ranks of those who achieve prominence in the screen's most closely allied art.

WRITES an old subscriber: "You say you like Jimmie Fidler's cocksuredness. I like yours. I love the way you pat yourself on the back when anything happens that you said was going to happen. I have a pretty good memory. I recall the fact that when they were unknown lassies you predicted big things for Myrna Loy, Jean Arthur, Bette Davis and some others. But why remind me of it?" Funny thing, this bragging about one's wisdom as a prophet. I claim it is not an egotistical gesture.

For instance, if I predict today that within two years Joe Doakes will be one of the biggest box-office names in pictures, the big army of new Spectator readers will attach no significance to the prediction. To make it mean anything to new readers I first have to qualify as a prophet. I cite the instance of Myrna, Jean and Bette, or any of many more I could mention, to establish the assumption that I may be right about Joe—or, in other words, to make the prediction worth the time it takes to read it. I do not deny that I get quite a lot of smug satisfaction out of drawing attention to my prophetic powers, but, strictly between you and me, I don't think much of them myself, because everything I have predicted was so self-evident it should have been apparent to everyone. I just happened to have a vehicle for recording the prediction.

 $oldsymbol{A}_T$ that, though, it is interesting to go back from present day facts and find out how they square with yesterday's theories. In the Los Angeles Examiner of February 12, 1937, Louella Parsons writes: "Ray Milland gets nearer and nearer top spot honors.... I've said before, but I'll say again, that Milland is one of the best bets on the screen for 1937. He's going places, and how." In the Spectator of February 24, 1934—three years before almost to the day—I wrote: "Raymond Milland, whom I have seen doing so well in several small bits that I began to wonder if his personality and ability ever would be discovered by some astute producer, has an important part in Bolero and more than justifies my previously formed estimate of his screen value. He is ingratiating, good looking and clever, and easily can become a great favorite.... Producers should give him the opportunities he needs.' I have no personal interest in Milland, never have met him, but what producers see in him now is what I saw in him three years ago. I believe my notice was the first he got. To me, the most interesting prediction I have made was in the case of Evelyn Brent. I saw her in a couple of unimportant pictures and devoted the greater part of a review to her possibilities. Three years later I saw her through the open door of her dressing-room on the Paramount lot where she was one of the most highly paid players. I went in and introduced myself to her. She told me she was on the point of abandoning her screen career in despair when she read my reference to her. "The knowledge that one person had faith in me," she said, "made me determined to see it through. I did not write a note of thanks to you. I knew some day I would meet you and could thank you personally. I have been waiting -and today you walk in." Betty Brent still has what I praised in her ten years ago. Her misfortune is that producers do not know it, as they did not know until today what Milland had three years ago.

FOR all that she is a daughter of Champion Sand Spring Star of Stockdale, which you will agree is really something to be the daughter of, Phoebe, my cocker spaniel, puts on no airs with me. Early in the morning she scouts around me when we go for our morning walk along unpaved byways in San Fernando Valley, protecting me from attack by gophers, jack rabbits and all other dangerous

enemies we encounter; she is lying beside my chair now as I write, and tonight, as always, she will sleep at the foot of my bed, my first stir in the morning bringing her up beside me to paw at the bedclothes I throw over my head; she wants her walk, and a new day's routine starts. Her own blue blood does not make her look down upon me. I am to her the greatest human being on earth. I can see that in her eyes when she looks at me. Phoebe and I -you and your dog-are living motion pictures which would warm the heart of the world. Yet to producers, dogs in pictures are just nuisances; when they put one in they present him as an actor, not as just your dog or mine, friends who know all about loyalty and nothing whatever about acting. My eagerness to see a real dog picture is no new thing. In the volume 1, number 1 Spectator, March 20, 1926, one of the leading articles bore the heading, Isn't It About Time We Had a Real Dog Picture? I have been hoping ever since.

FILM producers, apparently lacking analytical powers to think in terms of their business and figure out that Shirley Temple logically must head the list of the world's greatest box-office favorites, should start with the fact of her being so and think backward until they arrive at the reason. Every ill the film industry has suffered was due to the complete misunderstanding of the nature of its business by those who are in control of it.

O^F all the noted singers who have been lured into pictures none brings to them more native and acquired qualifications for a screen career than Gladys Swarthout. What Paramount has done to her is a crime. In the hands of an intelligent producer she today would be one of the leading box-office favorites. Instead, she has been given stories not at all suitable to her and asked to do characterizations into which her personality could not fit. Paramount's trouble was its proceeding upon the conviction that all Miss Swarthout need do to establish boxoffice value is to fill film theatres with the golden notes of her voice and that the parts she had to play between songs could be anything giving her plenty of opportunities to sing. Personality is the only thing which can build and maintain box-office strength. Acting ability alone does not make stars. The screen's greatest stars never have been and never will be its greatest actors. Neither will singing alone, or dancing, or any other individual talent a player possesses, make him a box-office star. Such talents can increase the stature of a star, but what makes him a star is his personality, the seeds of which are born in him, the measure of his success being determined by the degree in which his personality has been developed. Paramount should not look for stories which give Gladys Swarthout opportunities to sing. Its first concern should be to make us like her, which means selecting stories which match her personality. When we like her she can sing anything, and we will like it.

A LONG time ago the Spectator registered its first protest against the so frequent inclusion of drinking scenes in pictures. The Hays organization finally has caught up with us. Recently the elimination of such scenes from scripts has been added to Joe Breen's other

multitudinous chores. It is a queer thing that the film industry has to maintain an organization to force upon it regard for ordinary good taste. A few years ago the industry paid no attention to the Spectator when it first uttered a warning as to what would happen if the indulgence in pornography were continued. It was continued until the industry had the League of Decency on its neck. Pictures are decent today, not because producers developed a sense of decency, but because decency was forced upon them. A sorry spectacle.

APPARENTLY it is Hollywood's intention to ward off for as long as possible the inevitable hour when it must settle down and make just motion pictures. Its urge to shoot biographies is strong within it at the present moment. It seems to be proceeding on the assumption the public will like such pictures because of their biographical content and without regard for their entertainment qualities. Some of the names mentioned for filmic resurrection do not impress me as suggesting much in the way of stories. I believe if I were a producer intent upon digging up someone to write a story about, I would pick Robert Burns, who not only was one of the greatest poets of all time, but was also one of the most interesting personalities in Scottish history. A picture about him would give its producer a chance to bring to American audiences something they would like to see—some of the picturesque scenery in which Scotland abounds, the locality in which Burns was born and lived being rich in photographic possibilities. The poet's works could figure largely in the exploitation of such a production.

OUR film barons assure us the public wants new faces on the screen. The new faces are sought on the stage, the worst possible training ground for one desiring a career as a screen player. Before the new faces develop film box-office value they have to be old faces, so it looks to me as if it would be wiser to get along with the stock of old faces already on hand and not waste so much time just sitting around waiting for a new face to become old enough to bring money into the box-office.

WHEN I told a producer the other day that I thought there was too much talking in the latest picture he had made from a Broadway play, he asked me how he could have put the play on the screen except by using the dialogue in the original. I reminded him that when pictures were silent some of his successful productions were screen versions of stage plays. He countered that with the silliest argument ever advanced to justify the talkie—that the public demands dialogue. The public demands only entertainment. It wants to know what is happening on the screen, and if it is necessary to its understanding that it should hear spoken lines it must hear them, but it would be pleased better if the stories gave it less to listen to and more to see. In turning its business over to dialogue writers the film industry made a grave mistake. It is making money now, but if it would get back to its business of making motion pictures, its profits would make today's balance sheets convey the impression that the depression days were back again.

Some Late Previews

Gives the Screen New Dignity

LOST HORIZON, Columbia release of a Frank Capra production. Stars Ronald Colman. Features Jane Wyatt, John Howard, Margo, Thomas Mitchell and Edward Everett Horton. Screen play by Robert Riskin; from novel by James Hilton; directed by Frank Capra; musical director, Max Steiner; musical score by Dimitri Tiomkin; photography by Joseph Walker; aerial photography, Elmer Dyer; technical adviser, Harrison Forman; film editor, Gene Havlick; special camera effects, E. Roy Davidson and Ganahl Carson; art director, Stephen Goosson; costumes, Ernst Dryden; voice, Hall Johnson Choir. Supporting cast: Isabel Jewell, H. B. Warner, Sam Jaffe, David Torrence, Hugh Buckler, Val Durand, Milton Owen, Willie Fung, Victor Wong, John Burton, John Miltern, John T. Murray, Dennis D'Auburn, Noble Johnson, John Tettener, Matthew Carlton, Joe Herrera, Margaret McWade, Ruth Robinson, Carl Stockdale, Wryley Birch, Richard Masters, Alex Shoulder, G. Kalili. Running time, 125 minutes.

A sweep screen art can attain, a production of magnitude and impressiveness, a powerful sermon on right living, preached in a fascinating setting and coming at a time when the world sadly needs the lesson it teaches—such is Lost Horizon, one of the most meritorious of all the long succession of screen offerings Hollywood has given the world, an ambitious undertaking for a studio to attempt, and right nobly has Columbia realized its possibilities. To Harry Cohn for his bravery, to Stephen Goosson for settings of scenic grandeur, to Robert Riskin for a brilliantly written screen play, and to Frank Capra for another such exhibition of the Capra direction, are due recognition for jobs well done.

The cast is worthy of the physical and literary merits of the vehicle in which it is presented. Ronald Colman's performance is the best of the many which have made him a worldwide favorite. The part evidently was to his liking. He gets inside it, understands it, and plays it easily, effortlessly and with deep sincerity. It is a cinematic performance, its greatest moments being in close-ups which graphically depict his inward struggle to master the conflict in his mind. No words he could utter could have made his thoughts clearer to the audience. The other members of the cast amply sustain the high acting standard he sets, all the performances being artistic bits of a completely harmonious pattern. Capra's direction of his players reveals outstanding skill.

W HATEVER Columbia could do to make the story a success on the screen has been done brilliantly, painstakingly, thoroughly, and without regard for cost. It was a grand thing for Harry Cohn to do and he has done it superbly. But whether he and Capra were wise in their selection of story material, presuming, of course, their object was to produce a box-office success, remains to be seen. The book from which the screen play was written won wide popularity by virtue of the charm of the author's literary style; he conducted us on a long journey to a fascinating destination built of his dreams, and there he expounded his views on our social existence, diagnosed its ills and prescribed a remedy.

Leisurely, because we can put down a book at will, we feasted on its literary charm, drank of its poetic flavor, and each of us visualized its description to suit his individual fancy. Riskin and Capra, between them, have caught the literary charm of the book; Goosson has translated the descriptions in physical terms which are expressed with artistic impressiveness by Joseph Walker's camera, with the result that the perfect blending of all the elements of the three arts of literature, architecture and the drama gives us a rare intellectual treat. But I cannot recall a screen offering with purely intellectual appeal having earned hearty box-office response, a picture which pursued such a leisurely course having gained wide popularity.

FOR all that it has physical attributes both thrilling and visually spectacular, the story has few of the complications of which successful motion pictures are made. A party of conflicting personalities is kidnaped by airplane, conducted to a spot far beyond our conjectural boundary of civilization, all but two remain there, the two fight the elements on the way out, one perishes, the other eventually fights his way back. That is the story, and all the action points to its justification. It is a philosophical treatise rather than the sort of elemental drama we are trained to expect in a film theatre. Its philosophy is mentally fascinating, but belongs more in a book than upon the screen. Its denial of action in expounding its philosophy, its lack of physical progress while its mental phase is being developed, can make a book engrossing, but makes a picture drag. From a purely screen standpoint, Lost Horizon is too long.

But there is much in it that long will be remembered—the beauty of many of its speeches, Sam Jaffe's reading of those which fall to him, the intelligent comedy of Edward Everett Horton, the sustained rebellion of young John Howard, the remarkably expressive performance of H. B. Warner, the sweetness and understanding of Jane Wyatt, the pathos of Isabel Jewell, the smoldering fire of Margo, the humanness of Thomas Mitchell, the livid bits contributed by many more, particularly that of David Torrence, an actor of great ability who is the victim of great neglect by those who hire ability.

You cannot afford to miss it if you take an intelligent interest in the progress of the screen, for Lost Horizon is one of the landmarks on the course it has pursued to date.

Mervyn in a Merry Mood

THE KING AND THE CHORUS GIRL, Warner Bros. picture. A Mervyn LeRoy production. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy; assistant director, Arthur Lueker; original screen play by Norman Krasna and Groucho Marx; music and lyrics by Werner R. Heymann and Ted Koehler; photography by Tony Gaudio, A.S.C.; film editor, Thomas Richards; art director, Robert M. Haas; gowns by Orry-Kelly; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; production numbers staged by Bobby Connolly. Cast: Fernand Gravet, Joan Blondell, Edward Everett Horton; Alan Mowbray, Mary Nash, Jane Wyman, Luis Alberni, Kenny Baker, Shaw and Lee, Lionel Pape, Leonard Mudie, Adrian Roseley.

WORTH twice as much as you will be asked to see it even in the most expensive house. For one thing, it introduces a new player you will be charmed to meet.

Fernand Gravet, assuming he sticks at it, soon will be one of our greatest box-office stars. For another thing, it brings us a new Joan Blondell, a girl who demonstrates her ability to hold up the feminine end of a picture against the stiffest masculine competition. And then the direction of Mervyn LeRoy atones for the poor job he did when he photographed the Three Men On a Horse play. The King and the Chorus Girl is very much Mervyn. He found Gravet and brought him to this country.

The Frenchman has everything—youth, good looks, grace, acting ability, knowledge of how to wear clothes, and not even a trace of foreign accent to remind us he is not one of us. I have been wondering when Joan was going to be given an opportunity to do something better than the parts she has been playing. She has that indispensable photographic personality out of which motion picture stars are made; she feels the part she plays, the devilment, humor, pathos of it, and the camera brings it to us. Warners would be wise in casting her only in important pictures. Given the opportunities, she soon would establish herself as a star.

HE story of the picture is really about but four people, the other two being Mary Nash and Edward Everett Horton. Miss Nash is a most accomplished actress and makes a big contribution to the production. Horton's career has to its credit the making of such a long name so well known. The greatest compliment I can pay his present performance is that it is up to his established standard. A jerk of his head is more eloquent than the sustained speech of the majority of comedians. Alan Mowbray and Louis Alberni, in brief appearances, do much to add to the joyousness of the offering.

LeRoy's direction is deft, fluent, and reveals a keen sense of humor. A disposition to permit Gravet to read lines too loudly is the only weakness of an otherwise perfect job. I understand this is Mervyn's first production under his contract as an independent producer. If we may accept it as a sample of what he is going to give us, we can look forward to some highly entertaining pictures. His choice of story for Gravet's American debut could not be wiser, permitting, as it does, the Frenchman to display a wide assortment of wares. Norman Krasna and Groucho Marx are to be credited with a fine piece of screen writing, Robert Haas with a series of outstanding sets and Tony Gaudio with artistic photography.

Bobby Connolly gives us some striking dance spectacles, and Leo Forbstein has provided the production with a musical score which is a big factor in making it so enjoyable. Kenny Baker's singing also is a feature.

Columbia Presents Riskin

WHEN YOU'RE IN LOVE, a Columbia picture. Story based on an idea by Ethel Hill and Cedric Worth; written and directed by Robert Riskin; assistant director, Arthur S. Black; photography, Joseph Walker, A.S.C.; sound engineer, Lodge Cunningham; film editor, Gene Milford; musical director, Alfred Newman; art director, Stephen Goosson; gowns, Bernard Newman; production ensembles staged by Leon Leonidoff, courtesy Radio City Music Hall; associate producer, Everett Riskin; musical credits, OUR SONG, music by Jerome Kern; THE WHISTLING BOY, lyrics by Dorothy Fields; MINNIE THE MOOCHER, music by Cab Calloway; lyrics

by Irving Mills and Clarence Glaskill; arrangement by Al Siegel; SERENADE, Schubert; IN THE GLOAMING, Annie Harrison; SIBONAY, Lecuona. Cast: Grace Moore, Cary Grant, Aline Mac-Mahon, Henry Stephenson, Thomas Mitchell, Catherine Doucet, Luis Alberni, Gerald Oliver Smith, Emma Dunn, George Pearce, Frank Puglia.

WRITTEN and directed by Robert Riskin. He started with an idea and made it into screen entertainment. When it was announced that Riskin, the writing member of the Capra-Riskin team, was to become a director without ceasing to be a writer, the SPECTATOR predicted a successful career for him, pointing out that the author of a screen play was the logical person to make a picture from it. When a screen writer puts a scene on paper, he sees it on his mental screen exactly as it should be shot in relation to the other elements of the story. To preserve the unity of the creation the audience should get the scene as he sees it, provided always, of course, that his script is a good one. When it is given to someone else to direct, it will be shot, naturally, to conform to his conception of the scene, not the writer's, a fact which explains why many inherently good stories come to the screen as poor motion pictures. When more writers become directors and more directors become writers, we should have better

Riskin's direction bears none of the earmarks of inexperience. It is consistent, assured, intelligent, and puts him at one jump into the ranks of directors to whom we can look confidently for a series of pictures of high entertainment quality. Both in the script and in its interpretation a lively sense of humor is displayed, the production sparkling with witty touches which, combined with its other elements, make it delightfully entertaining.

WHILE one could wish for less reliance on dialogue than Riskin displays in carrying his story forward, When You're in Love is a noteworthy example of talkie construction. It is by long odds the best picture in which Grace Moore has appeared and will rank in popularity with her first, One Night of Love, which owed a great deal of its success to the fact of its being the initial offering of a grand opera singer as a screen star. Riskin cleverly manages to work in the musical numbers as integral parts of the story, not as impediments to its forward progress as they have been in all other pictures of the sort. And he wisely refrains from giving us too many of them.

Another outstanding merit of the script is the impression it gives that it is not taking Miss Moore's voice too seriously, thus leaving to us the discovery of its charms. The star is presented as a woman in love with a man. As such we become interested in her. She happens to be a great singer. That is interesting, but not overly important. She sings a half dozen times, and because we like her, and for the added reason that she sings things we like—In the Gloaming, Schubert's Serenade, a delightful song for children—her voice charms us and we like her more than ever. She makes no effort to overwhelm us with her singing, to exploit her singing technique.

ONE of the star's contributions, the one which prompted the preview audience to applaud long and vigorously, was her inimitable singing of the rowdy song, Minnie the Moocher. That one number will be remembered after we have forgotten what else she sang. Its interpolation was a stroke of genius on the part of Riskin, and it, like everything else, fitted smoothly into place as part of the story. It did more to characterize Miss Moore, to make her popular with the audience, than any other incident in her performance. It proved that she really was a good fellow, for all that the world hailed her as a great singer.

But when we come to performances we must put the crown on Cary Grant's brow. When You're in Love is his picture. He plays a lovable, impractical, irresponsible artist, and puts into his characterization zestful understanding which makes it a delight. A brilliantly written part, brilliantly played, it will bring to Cary recognition as an actor of first importance. He was fortunate in being directed by the man who put the characterization on paper, and Riskin was fortunate in having a man who brings so graphically to life the part as it was written. Aline MacMahon, in that quiet way which suggests dynamic artistic ability underlying it, makes a big contribution to the excellence of the acting. Emma Dunn is another who makes her presence felt. The whole cast, in short, is in every way satisfactory. I am developing a liking for the acting of Thomas Mitchell.

NLY in one sequence did Riskin fail to develop all possible values. Grant takes Miss Moore to a spot in the country to acquaint her with the real values of lifemajestic trees and their whispering branches, birds and the songs they sing, the sweet smell of things which grow in the shade of sylvan glens. The grand opera singer gets the mood of the setting, leans against a tree and sings a beautiful number, the words of which were written by Dorothy Fields and the music by Jerome Kern. The sequence gets its values from the beauty of the song and the mood of the location, yet it is largely a series of close-ups of the two people in it, one singing, the other listening. After the two are established, we should not see them again; we should see only shots of the surroundings, particularly a long shot bringing out the majesty of the forest and the relative unimportance of the two humans, two little things we glimpse in the distance. There is no cinematic demand for even one of the close-ups.

Columbia has given the picture a splendid production. Stephen Goosson's skill being responsible for some highly attractive settings. All Joseph Walker's photography is of a high order, but some of the outdoor shots are breathtaking in their beauty. In the woodland sequence referred to above, there are several cuts from the two people to different wild things which live in the forest, scenes which must have been shot under a wide variety of conditions, yet all are lighted alike and the quality of the photography is even throughout.

All in all, When You're in Love is one of the better pictures you cannot afford to miss. And you should put yourself in a position to say, a few years hence when all

of us will be talking about him, that you saw the first picture Bob Riskin directed.

It Has Complications Plus

LOVE IS NEWS, 20th Century-Fox. Associate producers, Earl Carroll and Harold Wilson; director, Tay Garnett; story, William R. Lipman and Frederick Stephani; screen play, Harry Tugend and Jack Yellen; photographer, Ernest Palmer; musical director, David Buttolph; film editor, Irene Morra; assistant director, Booth McCracken. Cast: Tyrone Power, Loretta Young, Don Ameche, Slim Summerville, Dudley Digges, Walter Catlett, George Sanders, Jane Darwell, Stepin Fetchit, Pauline Moore, Elisha Cook, Jr., Frank Conroy, Edwin Maxwell, Charles Williams, Julius Tannen, George Humbert, Frederick Burton, Charles Coleman, Paul McVey, Carol Tevis, Ed Deering, George Offerman, Jr., Wade Boteler, Maidel Turner, Dorothy Christy.

ONLY extraordinarily clever screen writing and unusually brilliant direction could crowd into one screen offering as many incidents as Love Is News contains, and keep them from telescoping the thing into a filmic blur. As much happens in one reel as generally happens in a whole picture, complication coming hot on the heels of complication to make one of the most joyous parades of comedy situations any audience could wish for. The picture scintillates with humor of a genuine, clean sort and must be rated among the top comedies of recent years. Following the story is a fascinating pastime. It is like climbing unwearily a flight of softly carpeted steps, expecting each to be the last and that after that the going will be straight ahead. But the last step is the final fadeout, each preceding one being a fresh complication which makes you wonder what the next one possibly can be.

It takes expert direction to make a story of that sort into a completely satisfactory picture. It moves so fast the director must be on the alert to develop his characterizations, to keep his players from being merely jumping jacks and not rational human beings intent on the task of working their way out of the extraordinary situations which come with such bewildering rapidity. Tay Garnett's direction is inspired. He has handled skilfully a wide variety of stories but never before was given such an opportunity to display a sense of humor comparable with that which makes Love Is News such joyous entertainment. It easily could have been confusing, but Tay carries it forward speedily, smoothly and logically, and carries us along with it without putting a strain on our attention. It gives him rating as an outstanding comedy director to add to his previously earned laurels along other lines.

TYRONE POWER has top billing, and richly earns the distinction. Handsome in a manly way, young, intelligent, he is destined to become a star of major importance, the impression he will make in this picture being a long step in that direction. His role demands of him a wide variety of emotional reaction, and he proves himself master of all its moods. Loretta Young never before shone with quite such brilliancy. Lovely to look at, wearing clothes in a manner further to dignify their dignity, revealing keen appreciation of the full value of all her scenes, her performance will add to the already large army of those who admire her. Don Ameche, as the harassed

city editor of the newspaper story, proves himself a rare comedian, a really brilliant performer also destined to achieve wide popularity. In the flock of characters who are involved in the complications, Walter Catlett stands out as an able laugh-getter. One of our most accomplished comedians, it is gratifying to see that Century is giving him opportunities to add considerably to the box-office value of its productions.

The story is an ingenious one. Loretta plays America's richest girl whose daily doings are recorded in your morning paper; she is sick of the publicity persecution; Power is her chief persecutor and to get even with him she gives his competing papers a story which brings him into the publicity light he has been shedding on her. She announces her engagement to Power and her pre-nuptial gift to him of one million dollars. And that starts something. He is followed even into his bath by people who want to sell him things. You can imagine the complications which could ensue, but you cannot imagine how many do or how funny they are. So I think you had better see Love Is News.

When Comparison Is Odious

JOHN MEADE'S WOMAN, Paramount release of B. P. Schulberg production. Stars Edward Arnold and Francine Larrimore. Features Gail Patrick, George Bancroft, John Trent, Aileen Pringle and Sidney Blackmer. Directed by Richard Wallace; story by John Bright and Robert Tasker; screen play by Herman Mankiewicz and Vincent Lawrence; photographed by Harry Fischbeck; art direction, Albert D'Agostino; musical direction, Boris Morros; original music, Frederick Hollander; sets, George T. Nicoll; film editor, Robert Bischoff; assistant director, Ray Lissner. Supporting cast: Willard Robertson, Jonathan Hale, Stanley Andrews, Harry Hayden, Robert Strange. Running time, 88 minutes.

ONE you should see. It is one of the honest, sincere productions we have learned to expect from Ben Schulberg who appreciates that in the film business money must be spent to make money. All its physical elements convey the impression that the producer was actuated by a desire to give us full value for our money. My consideration of the other values of John Meade's Woman was influenced by the fact of my having seen it so soon after seeing The Good Earth, a picture which demonstrates the ease with which a screen story can be told by the camera. The Meade story is told entirely in dialogue, a treatment which, by virtue of being a purely intellectual approach, challenges one's critical faculties. Before The Good Earth, I was reconciled to the talkie form and could estimate the values of a dialogue picture with a more open mind than I am afraid I will be able to bring to bear on a talkie until the influence of the Metro picture wears off.

So I tell you to see John Meade's Woman if for no other reason than the stimulation it will give your critical sense. As for the completeness of the satisfaction it will give you, I refer you to the unqualified praise other reviewers have given it, and I advise you to be guided more by their opinions than by mine.

HE most interesting feature of the production is the presence in the cast of Francine Larrimore, an engaging young woman from the stage without any previous experience in pictures and who is presented as co-star. Her stage

reputation is established, and to the screen she brings her stage art, giving a fine stage performance with little suggestion of the screen in it. I admired her technique but she did not molest my emotions. It was not altogether her fault. Her part was written poorly, providing her with two drinking sequences which made it hard for me to sympathize with her. We see her first as a country girl who apparently had spent all her life on a farm; and as soon as she reaches the city she seems at home with her elbows on a bar and ordering whiskies straight.

On the stage an attractive young woman can enact a drunken scene without sacrifice of audience sympathy. We are aware, even though subconsciously perhaps, that she is an actress impersonating a drunken woman. If in a film theatre we become conscious we are looking at actors, the picture has failed to develop the illusion of reality it must develop to be a worthy example of screen art. In her opening sequence we regard Miss Larrimore as a country girl, not as an actress, and her misfortunes earn our sympathy. When she becomes drunk, she is not to us an actress skilfully enacting a drunken scene; she is the simple country girl gone wrong, and thereafter we merely sit back and look at her without being disturbed by her sorrows. Therein lies the difference between the appeals of the stage and the screen.

Bancroft who carries off the acting honors of the production. Easy, natural, convincing, he is the lumberman, not the actor, and is the only one among the principals who strikes a human note. Edward Arnold is not impressive. One grows weary of his bursts of laughter for which there is no excuse. The screen should be noisy only when noise cannot be avoided, only when the story point can be brought out in no other way.

In this picture there is a sequence in which Arnold develops a chuckle into a roar in which he is joined by Bancroft and Miss Larrimore. The sequence would have been better motion picture and far more entertaining if all three had indulged in wide grins. There is no excuse for the uproar. Gail Patrick, who seems to be growing even more beautiful with each picture, graces this one with her presence and adequately handles a rather unsympathetic part. Sidney Blackmer always has impressed me as being one of the most intelligent and accomplished actors in pictures. Entirely without self-consciousness, he so completely is the person he plays that we are apt to deny him the credit due him for his valuable contribution to every production in which he appears.

The story of John Meade's Woman could be better. The picture makes me imagine the story got out of hand and that difficulty was experienced in ending it effectively. Arnold makes his Meade an unscrupulous, dynamic captain of industry who rides roughshod over his victims, deceiving even the girl he marries, a girl, incidentally, much too young to make the romance convincing. The picture ends abruptly on his assertion that he will right the wrongs he had committed, and we leave the theatre with the conviction that as soon as he is up and around again he will be back at his old tricks.

The Very Last of Mrs. Cheney

THE LAST OF MRS. CHENEY, M.G.M. Producer, Lawrence Weingarten; director, Richard Boleslawski; play, Frederick Lonsdale; screen play, Leon Gordon, Samson Raphaelson and Monckton Hoffe; photographer, George Folsey; musical score, Dr. William Axt; film editor, Frank Sullivan; assistant director, Eddie Woehler. Cast: Joan Crawford, William Powell, Robert Montgomery, Frank Morgan, Jessie Ralph, Nigel Bruce, Colleen Clare, Benita Hume, Ralph Forbes, Aileen Pringle, Melville Cooper, Leonard Carey, Sara Haden, Lumsden Hare, Wallis Clark, Barnett Parker,

THIS, undoubtedly, will be the last of Mrs. Cheney as a screen attraction. Beautifully mounted, brilliantly cast, well directed, The Last of Mrs. Cheney is dead on its feet, the most uninteresting piece of screen entertainment I have seen in a long time. The only really interesting thing in it is the hat Joan Crawford wears in the opening sequence and the striking hairdress upon which it perches—quite like a saucy Zulu hut in a curly jungle. When Joan first donned it, a ripple of comment floated across the audience. But the hat serves a useful purpose: it gives me a text for another short cinematic sermon, the theme of which has grown aged in these pages, necessitating my dressing it up in new words in an effort to cover its wrinkles.

There are some fundamental laws which apply to all arts. One of the most important is that no element should isolate itself and draw attention to itself as something apart from the remainder of the composition. The moment Joan dons her hat we forget everything else and think only of it. When an art creation as a whole has to compete for our attention with one of its elements, we have an example of poor art. The strength of the creation lies in the coordination of all its parts, in the unity it establishes and maintains. A drummer's drumming may in itself be a perfect example of the drummer's art, but if it is loud enough to drown out the other instruments, the symphony becomes a poor example of musical art. Now let us get back to the Metro picture.

THE story is an old one built on the psychology of its times. It asks us to take to our hearts a nice looking young woman who ingratiates herself with a British duchess for the purpose of stealing her pearls. It is a comedy of repartee in glad rags and rich surroundings, of a gang of crooks and a group of smart people. I do not know how much the fact of my knowing the story affected my consideration of the picture as entertainment. Usually such knowledge is not a bar to my enjoyment if in the retelling the job is a good one; I still can cheer the heroine and hiss the villain. But the new Mrs. Cheney left me cold all the way through, creating in me no impulse either to cheer or to hiss.

For one thing, the production was over-built. No one could accept the ultra-modern interiors as the ancestral home of a British duchess. Told in a true old-world setting, with ancient family retainers hobbling about in it, with Van Dyked former dukes hanging soberly on the walls and ancient armor doing sentry duty in the corridors, the modern crook drama might have gained luster from the setting's glamor.

For another thing, not the slightest effort was made to develop the cinematic values of the story. It is a photo-

graph of the play told merely with greater geographical sweep. It cackles all the way through and the cackles are devoid of interest as such. The performances are uninspired. I understand Metro is thinking of doing more revivals. I hope it will profit from the fact that the smelling salts it put under Mrs. Cheney's nose to revive her were not quite strong enough.

Thanks to Good Direction

HER HUSBAND'S SECRETARY, Warners, Associate producer, Bryan Foy; director, Frank McDonald; dialogue director, Reginald B. Hammerstein; story, Crane Wilbur; screen play, Lillie Hayward; photographer, Arthur Todd; film editor, Clarence Kolster; assistant director, Carrol Sax. Cast: Jean Muir, Beverly Roberts, Warren Hull, Joseph Crehan, Clara Blandick, Addison Richards, Harry Davenport, Gordon Hart, Minerva Urecal, Pauline Garon, Stuart Holmes.

THERE really was no reason why Bryan Foy should not make it again. Every studio makes it at intervals and Warners had not made it for quite some time; so Crane Wilbur took the private secretary and her employer's wife and wrote them into another screen story which is related to us in a talkie called Her Husband's Secretary. As only censorable things have been left to be said about a secretary and her boss, Wilbur said all the old things over again and added a forest fire which none of the other authors of the story happened to have thought of. Warners built a nice production for it, very nice indeed; and Bryan Foy provided for the leading parts three young people who have personality, ability and good looks; and for the other roles seasoned veterans who know their stuff.

But the wisest thing Bryan did was to select Frank McDonald to direct the oft-told tale. For all that there is nothing new in it except the forest fire, Her Husband's Secretary comes to the screen as a thoroughly entertaining talking picture. It is the best class B production I have seen since Smart Blonde, and that also happened to have been directed by McDonald. The intelligence this young director brings to bear on his task is reflected in the excellent, understanding performances given him by Jean Muir (wife), Betty Roberts (secretary), and Warren Hull (employer). There is a sensitive quality in Jean's work which few of our screen girls can match, and underlying it is an active brain which develops all the possibilities of the parts she plays. Betty Roberts, too, always is dependable, her pleasing personality and acting ability making each of her performances outstanding.

W ARREN HULL is one of the most agreeable young men on the screen. As the steel riveter in the opening sequence he reveals talent as a light comedian, and later as the head of a building company he meets fully all the emotional demands as a man who loves his wife even when he yields to the allurements of his attractive and designing secretary. Clara Blandick, Joseph Crehan, Addison Richards, Harry Davenport, and Minerva Urecal also give excellent performances.

But it is the director who develops all the values of the story material. There is not another director in the business who could have improved upon the manner in which the story is told. And all that McDonald brings

to his task is ordinary screen sense. He had an intimate story to tell and he tells it in an intimate way. The characters speak to one another, not to the audience, the picture being a striking example of the value of this common sense direction of dialogue. McDonald carries his story forward with an easy flow which gives his old material a refreshing feeling of newness. Quietly and without apparent effort to achieve results, he develops emotional values in simple scenes, an outstanding example being his handling of a scene in which Jean Muir, Hull and Harry Davenport participate. It creates the impression in our minds that we are permitted to be in a room and to overhear an intimate family conversation obviously not intended for our ears. Her Husband's Secretary is not a big picture, but there is a big lesson in it for directors willing to learn how dialogue should be presented. You can put Frank McDonald down as a director worth watching. He is destined to do big things.

Might Have Been Great

MICHAEL STROGOFF, a Pandro S. Berman production. Directed by George Nicholls, Jr.; associate producer, Joseph Ermolieff; motion picture rights assigned by Society Jules Verne; screen play by Mortimer Offner, Anthony Veiller and Anne Morrison Chapin; musical director, Nathaniel Shilkret; photographed by Joseph H. August, A.S.C.; special effects by Vernon Walker, A.S.C.; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Perry Ferguson; orchestral arrangements by Maurice de Packh; costumes by Walter Plunkett; set dressing by Darrell Silvera; recorded by George D. Ellis; edited by Frederic Knudtson. Cast: Anton Walbrook, Elizabeth Allan, Akim Tamiroff, Margot Grahame, Fay Bainter, Eric Blore, Edward Brophy, Paul Guilfoyle, William Stack, Paul Harvey, Michael Visaroff.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

IN their screen play, Mortimer Offner, Anthony Veiller and Anne Morrison Chapin have made one notable contribution which gives this version of Michael Strogoff far more cohesion than the earlier silent film of years ago. Pure coincidence governed the saving of Strogoff's sight in the original; in this one, a woman's love and human greed form a logical basis for this vital part of the plot-continuity.

The casting is one department I can praise fervently and with abandon. Anton Walbrook's interpretation of Michael Strogoff is faultless. His understanding is consummate and his eyes interpret for us his innermost emotions. Mr. Walbrook is destined for screenland's heights. As the girl, Elizabeth Allan immediately captures the heart of every man and the sympathetic admiration of the women. She too gives us the perfect filmic portrayal—the eyes have it.

HAVE seen Akim Tamiroff in several bits. And each time his complete sincerity has won an instantaneous response from his audience. In Michael Strogoff he is given full opportunity to display his wares. I venture to predict his schedule from now on will be overflowing. Fay Bainter, a new personality, is genuine, pleasing the previewers to the point of giving her a whole-hearted burst of applause.

Although Eric Blore and Edward Brophy command my honest admiration as exceptionally fine comedians, their roles in *Michael Strogoff* were so definitely pasted on, and so distinctly an irritating filmic ulcer, I resented their every appearance. No fault of these splendid troupers; just another case of Big Brains at work in the office. With vigorous bits by Paul Guilfoyle, Paul Harvey, William Stack and Michael Visaroff, and with singularly fine mounting, Michael Strogoff will doubtless make money. It is that most pathetic of all Hollywood achievements—an unusual picture that might have been great.

Just Another Murder

MURDER GOES TO COLLEGE, Paramount production and release. Directed by Charles Riesner; based on novel by Kurt Steel; screen play by Brian Marlow, Robert Wyler and Eddie Welch; sound by Philip Wisdom and John Cope; film editor, Edward Dmytryk; musical direction by Boris Morros; art direction by Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman; photographed by Henry Sharp. Cast: Roscoe Karns, Marsha Hunt, Lynne Overman, Larry Crabbe, Astrid Allwyn, Harvey Stephens, Purnell Pratt, Barlow Borland, Earle Foxe, Anthony Nace, Terry Ray, Nick Lukats, Jack Chapin, Charles Wilson. Running time, 70 minutes.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

F any city had just one detective half as clever as our super-film-sleuths, all our crimes would be solved long before they are committed. But despite the fact that Lynne Overman is much more clever than all of the regular city force put together, he cannot get a real job as a detective and spends half his time dodging city dicks who apparently hope to pick up stray crumbs of his genius. What time he has left, he spends unraveling the murder that stumps our infant-brained regulars. Oh yes, at the end, of course, the trapped villain grabs up the murder-gun and finds to his amazement that it is empty! With such startling original material, Charles Riesner has succeeded surprisingly in turning out a genuinely clever film. Murder Goes to College is a tribute to his direction, to the excellent characterizations, and to the witty scripting of Brian Marlow, Robert Wyler and Eddie Welch. When impossible material is made really entertaining, that's something to brag about.

FIRST honors go to Lynne Overman. His work is sure-fire, giving him a wide-open door to feature rating. Larry Crabbe, whose magnificent frame won for him his start, proves himself to be as fine an actor as he is a swimmer, giving us as smooth a portrayal as any veteran luminary. I have always liked Larry's personality. It is a pleasure to discover that he will maintain his filmic rating on something more than big muscles.

Roscoe Karns is his usual ebullient self. It seems a shame that so versatile an actor apparently is doomed on the screen to habitual alcoholism. Marsha Hunt's interpretation of the gal who knows all the answers is flawless. And the brief, clear-cut bits by Harvey Stephens, Astrid Allwyn, Purnell Pratt and the rest of the cast, are largely responsible for the frothy strength of movement upon which Murder Goes to College depends for its interest. Not quite enough meat for a first film, it will support the other half; but for the almost-to-be-expected errors of dialogued explanation of the murder (instead of flash-back) and of dangerous information screamed across a public table—this B is distinctly better than most of its class.

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Mr. Brown Goes to Town

WHEN'S YOUR BIRTHDAY?, Radio release of David L. Loew production. Robert Harris, associate producer; directed by Harry Beaumont; screen play by Harry Clork from a play by Fred Ballard; adaptation by Harvey Gates, Malcolmn Stuart Boylan and Samuel M. Pike; musical score by Samuel Wineland; photographed by George Robinson; art direction by John Ducasses Schulze; RCA High Fidelity sound recorded by Ralph Shugart; edited by Jack Ogilvie; assistant director, Sandy Roth. Cast: Joe E. Brown, Marian Marsh, Fred Keating, Edgar Kennedy, Maude Eburne, Suzanne Kaaren, Margaret Hamilton, Minor Watson, Frank Jenks, Don Rowan, Granville Bates, Charles Judels, Jimmy O'Gatty and Bull Montana. Running time, 70 minutes.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

ALWAYS a synonym for fun, Joe E. Brown hits the hilarity note right from the start in this first of the bigger and much better series he is beginning for R.K.O. As a matter of fact, if When's Your Birthday? is a genuine forecast, the already legion of Brown fans will grow like Townsend membership in the old folks home. You will heartily enjoy the continuous light-tempoed nonsense Joe dishes out, thanks to Harry Clork's clever writing and Harry Beaumont's smoothly competent direction. Here's a sample: Immersed in his passion for astrology, Joe dreamily says to Edgar Kennedy, his prospective father-in-law, "I'm a Bull, you're a Goat, your daughter (Suzanne Kaaren) is a Scorpion and your wife is a Crab." Delicate inferential analysis is given the audience when Margaret Hamilton, the family maid, comes back with: "Boy, that's pickin' 'em!"

Rating Mr. Brown as tops in entertainment (who in the world but Joe could sit on the street curb with a little dog, howl at the moon in duet and do a more convincing job of it than the pup?), Marian Marsh, on the other hand, is first in emotional appeal as the completely sweet girl with whom Joe unrealizingly is in love. As the other woman, Suzanne Kaaren does a suave act of being a nuisance. Brisk supplementary humor is contributed by Fred Keating, Minor Watson and Maude Eburne. But naturally, I fell heavily for Corky, just as you will; he is one of the cutest of our screen pups.

THIS seems a good time to bring up a question that always strikes me whenever the writing staff of a film looks like an army muster. Why does it take so many writers to turn out one story? The obvious inference is that no one of them is capable of doing a competent job by himself. In When's Your Birthday? there is no scene or gag that has not been as cleverly executed before by a solitary writer in some other story. Look at this: Fred Ballard wrote the original. Harry Clork then takes it and turns out a nifty screen job. No sooner is his pen dry than in swarm Harvey Gates, Malcolm Stuart Boylan and Samuel H. Pike who proceed to give vent to their ideas of what continuity is made of. For a rare change, in When's Your Birthday? the end seems to justify the method. Unfortunately, the opposite is usually true.

At any odds, When's Your Birthday? is in sharp contrast to the long series of half-baked humors Joe has been forced to carry through the sheer force of his personal ability. With this sudden cooperation from the other departments, he definitely shows us the Spectator is right in its contention that a picture is good in propor-

tion to the unity with which its components are blended. Except for Joe's dream in Technicolor—and even if it was funny and logical—we have a fine blend of filmic ingredients: a clever story, a capable cast, a competent director, a scintillating star, all mixed with a natural riotous rhythm—that's When's Your Birthday?

New York Spectacle

By Frederick Stone

New York, February 22, 1937.

ON the off chance that someone may have noticed the absence of this department from the past several issues, I will take it upon myself to explain. I spent the month of January in Los Angeles, and therefore could not write anything. Let no one suppose that this was due to the fact that I could not write under the above because I was the length of a continent away from my subject; this would not have deterred me. The fact is that I could wrote nothing while in California for the purely mechanical reason that my fingers were frozen during the entire period of my stay.

Now that I have been back in New York for two weeks the fingers have thawed out sufficiently to permit of fairly accurate, if still somewhat benumbed, picking out of the typewriter keys with two of them. In fact, my doctor expects that under favorable circumstances I shall gradually be able to use the remaining fingers again, at least for pointing and for holding forks. He doubts whether they will all stand the shock of typing, some being more affected than others, unless I go to the trouble and expense of having a special keyboard made; keys made of jello floating on a cushion of air would be fine, he says, if this could be arranged.

Y ET this was not all that prevented me from resuming my writing under this heading. As soon as I had arrived in New York I fell ill with a most shattering form of tonsilitis known as quinsy, which was evidently the result of my having come rapidly from the healthy California climate, where no bacteria can exist during the winter months owing to the extreme cold, to New York, where they exist at all times. It appears that my blood became very thick and heavy while I was on the coast and was still in this condition upon my arrival in New York, so that when I inhaled a couple of germs which would ordinarily have done me no harm, they immediately multiplied in great unhampered delight, for the blood was moving about in my veins so slowly and sluggishly that by the time it had marshaled up its anti-bodies in defence I was too far gone to be saved. The irony is that the cure for quinsy is ice in the mouth, and I had just been congratulating myself upon getting away from California.

A Broadway season which had taken on the appearance of a community interment when I left town was, when I returned a brief six weeks later, leaping along with some shows selling three months in advance, and brokers offering seats for the same night to any of the five big hits at eight dollars apiece, if at all. You Can't Take It With You, The Women, Richard II, Wingless Victory and

Tonight at 8:30 have pulled the season's other foot out of the grave with such a start that the assembled mourners and pallbearers were left empty-handed and blinking.

AFTER seeing several sections of Noel Coward's presentation and also Claire Brokaw's The Women, I began to wonder whether someone had quietly altered the oldfashioned marriage vows to read: "And I solemnly resolve to be unfaithful to this woman (or man) at every opportunity and upon every possible occasion, with or without her (his) knowledge, until death us do rejoin.' The number of infidelities revealed in these plays can be arrived at by taking the total number of characters appearing in them and multiplying this figure by twentyseven. This, of course, refers only to the infidelities which take place more or less during the action of the plays, and does not take into account what has transgressed before. It was with the greatest relief that I saw a performance of You Can't Take It With You, and realized that a few of the homely virtues are still with us. Of course, the Kaufmann-Hart play is not about the smut set, which may explain everything.

The Eternal Road, Max Reinhart's spectacle which opened a year later than scheduled, demonstrates that rave notices in all the press are sometimes not enough to insure commercial success. The house was far from filled the night I attended. The presentation is a delight to the eye but, dealing all evening in a relentless monotone with the legendary and actual sufferings of the Jewish Race, it becomes pretty much of a weary experience to the mind. No audience can spend a whole evening watching a character or a group of characters take it constantly on the chin, without growing a bit tired of all this passivity.

FROM the historical point of view, the Jews have done a lot more in the world than search dejectedly through the ages for the promised land; and from the dramatic point of view, no matter how imposing and eye-filling the background to the action may be, if there is to be any play at all the downtrodden hero must sooner or later arise. Much as I admire Max Reinhart, Franz Werfel and Kurt Weill, I am afraid that The Eternal Road is an infernal bore.

British-Gaumont's latest starring vehicle for Jessie Matthews, Head Over Heels in Love, is generally one of the dullest films I have seen in many months, but I must give it great credit for having the intellectual independence and audacity to avoid a type of howling nonsense to which we have grown accustomed in the Hollywood musicals. As the film opens Jessie makes the acquaintance of a young man at a meat market, and he invites her to have lunch with him at his apartment. Once there he asks her what she does for a living, and she tells him that she sings. "Sing something, then," says he. But there is no musical instrument in the apartment, not even a piano, so Jessie, in order to oblige, sings a pretty song for him without accompaniment of any kind.

THIS is a tradition-shattering departure from the illogicality of the Hollywood treatment of similar passages, for as we all know if a singer and his beloved in a Holly-

wood musical film were to find themselves stranded in full Sahara and he were to pass the time with a song or two, he would start to sing without music, and lo! Divine Providence would rare back and pass a miracle, and in a trice he would be accompanied by a full thundering symphony orchestra—to the astonishment not of him or of his beloved, but only of those few members of the audience who can't figure the damned thing out.

New York has sent a challenge ringing across the continent to Hollywood in the form of a magnificent benefit which was given at Radio City Music Hall the other night for the relief of the flood sufferers. Every entertainment name of any consequence available was on a program which began at midnight and lasted before a packed house until half-past four in the morning. Receipts were in excess of sixty-five thousand dollars, which is a boon to the Red Cross; and as the tremendous audience struggled out of the theatre in the early morning, each member knew that he had witnessed a great act of charity on the part of artists and audience alike, as well as one of the most magnificent entertainments ever presented anywhere. Great credit is due Leonard Sillman for having conceived the idea and seen it through.

Robert Florey Directed OUTCAST

The camera is a potent instrument in a picture directed by Robert Florey. It brings to the screen much of the rick pictorial quality which the better European directors strive for and are so successful in attaining. In Outcast Florey tells his story with graphic progression which does not allow our attention to wander for a moment. It blends the performances into it until we have no feeling we are looking at players in acting parts.... All this tragic drama is developed powerfully by Florey's effective direction. When he first came to this country from Europe, the first thing he did here prompted me to predict in these pages that his career as a director would be a brilliant one, but Florey never seems to have been given the chance I would have given him if I were a producer. He has directed only the smaller pictures to which adherence to shooting schedules is deemed to be of more importance than the full development of their entertainment possibilities. Everything he has brought to the screen reveals a genius capable of great accomplishments, but the film business is such a weird one his genius is not recognized by those who could profit by it.-Welford Beaton, HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR.

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SPECTATOR

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REALITY AND ILLUSION

The Parts They Play in the Composition of a Motion Picture

The Third of a Series of Special Articles by the Editor Dealing with the Fundamentals of Screen Art

.... REVIEWED

SEVENTH HEAVEN * QUALITY STREET * WAIKIKI WEDDING HER HUSBAND LIES * SWING HIGH, SWING LOW * PERSONAL PROPERTY REFLECTION * GIRL OVERBOARD * SONG OF THE CITY WHEN LOVE IS YOUNG * GIRL LOVES BOY * MIDNIGHT TAXI THAT MAN'S HERE AGAIN * JIM HANVEY — DETECTIVE CALIFORNIA STRAIGHT AHEAD * WE HAVE OUR MOMENTS

THE SCREEN INDUSTRY CAN SERVE ITSELF BEST BY SERVING SCREEN ART MORE



From the



Editor's Easy Chair

(This is the third in a series of special articles by the Editor dealing with the fundamentals of screen art.)

O^{NE} objective all fine arts have in common is the suggestion of reality. But it is the mission of none to recreate nature. The mission of Art is to interpret nature; the mission of each artist to interpret it in terms of the medium in which he works.

When I stood one day before the statue of Aphrodite in the museum in Naples, I marveled at the fidelity with which the sculptor had chiselled marble away until a perfect human form was left; but, working in such a cold and rigid medium, it was beyond the skill of the artist to create in me the illusion that I was looking at a living woman. My response to the effort of the sculptor was intellectual appreciation of his skill. It thus was the artist, not the creation, that I admired, even though it was the degree of perfection the creation achieved that was the measure of my admiration for the creator.

When I visited the Louvre in Paris, I would have been embarrassed and pained if my absorption in the *Venus de Milo* had given me the illusion that I was looking at a real woman who had no arms and almost no clothes.

My favorite landscape hangs in the National Gallery, London. It is Constable's Hay Wain. It is not even the artist's best, but it appeals to me. I have sat in front of it for a total of hours. In the center foreground is a mud puddle. If the artist's skill had been great enough to give me the illusion that I was looking at a real mud puddle, I would not have spent five minutes in front of the picture, for I never yet have seen a mud puddle I cared to contemplate for even a fraction of that time.

ROBABLY the most arresting portrait I have seen is Gainsborough's Blue Boy, which hangs in the Huntington Library. It is a work of art the whole world praises, yet if the boy stepped from the frame and attended a costume ball, he would attract no particular attention if there were other costumes that shared the period of his.

The aural arts—symphonic music, the opera, and the drama—are either subjectively or objectively visual. The layman who lacks knowledge of the technique of symphonic composition can derive full enjoyment from an orchestra's playing of a symphony only by the exercise of his picturing sense to see the story the music tells. Opera and the drama become enjoyable only when the visual and aural senses function in sympathy with what is offered them. Sculpture and painting are wholly visu-

al, yet they share with the other arts the obligation to suggest movement, life, energy; to make us see them as their creators saw them, to grasp the stories their creators strove to have them tell.

All arts are story-telling mediums. Art was born when prehistoric man scratched symbols on the faces of cliffs, and antiquarians interpret for us the stories the primitive artist recorded in his drawings; and down through the ages, through the period of Greek pantomime, past the birth of printing, until today, authors, dramatists, sculptors, painters, composers, poets have been telling the world stories, each in the language of his individual art.

BUT it was beyond the power of any of them to create a perfect illusion of reality, an illusion so perfect we saw only the art object apart from the artist, saw Aphrodite as a woman and Blue Boy as a boy. All the arts strove to entertain us, but none succeeded in providing universal entertainment, in developing a language all could understand. Each had its audience composed of those who either instinctively or by training could follow the stories they told; but all lacked the simplicity of expression which dismissed the intellect as a factor in their understanding and appreciation. All of them, in their various degrees, were mental exercises, and not until mentalities attained a common level could all of them appeal equally to all mentalities.

Common to all the arts was their difficulty in creating a perfect illusion of reality. Arts derive their strength from their limitations, from being compelled to stay within limits arbitrarily set by their mechanics. The painter could suggest movement in the leaves on a tree bending in a storm, but it was beyond the power of his brush to make the suggestion so strong the viewer of the painting could imagine the leaves were moving. Thus it was that the "movement" we credited a painting with possessing was provided by our imaginations accepting sympathetically the suggestion expressed in the language of the painter's technique.

OVER a century ago the seeds of a new art were germinating in the restless brains of blazers of odd and unmapped trails. Men were endeavoring to create an illusion of motion by wedding persistence of vision and successively projected still pictures. Munsterberg tells us of Faraday, who in 1831 wrote on "a peculiar class of optical deceptions." In 1832 in both Germany and France

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devices were designed "by which pictures of objects in various phases of movement gave the impression of continued motion." The United States enters the prenatal story of the motion picture in 1872, when Muybridge, a Californian, photographed a trotting horse with twenty-four cameras, the shutters of which were opened successively by the horse himself, his feet as he moved forward breaking strings stretched across the track.

And that is all we did to make the motion picture possible until Eastman removed the difficulty blocking the progress of the various European experiments. To those experiments we owe credit for the motion picture of today, for the principles then established are those which govern the showing of pictures now. All the European pioneers needed to make the operation of their devices practical, was some substitute for the glass plates they were forced to use in their photographic process and which made difficult the projection of their images with sufficient speed to create the impression of continuous motion. Eastman's film solved that problem and was America's only important contribution to a machine which founded an art.

ALL the early progress of the art also was made in Europe. The progress continued until the World War checked it, up to which time American product suffered in comparison with what came to us from abroad. The war shifted the chief activity to this country where the business of making motion pictures became great, but the art languished, due to the failure of those who controlled it to realize its existence, a display of lack of intelligence which still persists. It was then, and still is, regarded strictly as a business.

It was the motion picture camera which gave the world its most graphic art, the one which possessed the power all others lacked, the power to create a perfect illusion of reality. It established complete unity of its elements. Its people were of the same substance as its settings, its drama enacted by photographs in photographed surroundings. It was beyond its power to introduce an element to disturb our complete acceptance of it as real. It is the only art which can show us yesterday's civilization (King of Kings) and tomorrow's (Things to Come), and make both live before our eyes—which can make us look into the living eyes of Pontius Pilate and those of a despot not yet born—which can do such things and make us believe them.

DROP into a friend's house some evening and find there a few other people you like. Sit in front of the fire and discuss the inconsequential happenings in the lives of those about you—the reason for Susie's change of dressmakers, the funny experience Jack had one evening at the Rutherfords, the straight flush Bob drew against four treys and a full, the letter from Aunt Agatha who is doing Europe, the best place to buy shoes, the changes you are going to make in your garden in the spring, why Mabel shifted all the furniture in the living room, the latest book Edith has read—an evening like thousands you have had and found enjoyable.

And why do you find such evenings enjoyable? Because you like your companions. Because the gathering is intimate, human, real. Because it is relaxation which makes no tiring demands on your mentality. Because it is pleasant entertainment. Because the mood of the gathering is agreeable.

MOOD comparable with that of the gathering in your friend's house can be developed in the mind of an audience by what is presented on the screen. We start with a mood receptive to the advances of the motion picture; we are there for the sole purpose of enjoying ourselves, and we respond readily to the first bid for our interest in what we see, are willing to accept the characters as people we know and extend our liking to those who reach for it. The camera takes us into intimate contact with the story people; we live among them and move along with them to the story's end. We become so intimate with all of them, we are entertained even when Arthur tells who makes his shirts.

Only by the completeness of the illusion of reality created by the camera can we completely share the mood of what is presented on the screen. Unless we feel what we are looking at is real, the film offering cannot entertain us. We cannot be entertained by shadows without substance, by photographs moving on a two-dimensional plane. When our mood is receptive to what is offered us, we see the photographs as real people moving in a world to which we ascribe height, breadth and depth, the same three-dimensional world in which we ourselves move. In other words, the art creation takes us out of the outer world of our material interests and places us in its own inner world. It does not try to entertain us; it takes us past the barrier between fact and fancy and allows us to entertain ourselves.

BEAR in mind always that we are discussing motion pictures, not talkies; screen art, not photographed stage technique. I am not one of those who accept the Hollywood view that the story is the element of chief importance and that its telling, no matter how—whether in dialogue or with pictures—is the thing that counts. The establishment and preservation of mood is the paramount interest. It is the mood of the gathering in our friend's house that makes us interested in the reason why Mabel rearranged the furnishing of her living room, in itself a trival thing, but of consequence because it concerns one we like. It is the mood which gives pictures their box-office value.

When the screen was silent, it lacked the mechanical means to disturb the illusion of reality by embracing reality as an integral element. It kept the police siren in its place as an illusive element in a world of illusion. If our imaginations were capable of accepting a photograph of it as a real siren, a photograph of a police officer as a real person whose hand was operating it, then surely our imaginations were capable of preserving the unity of the scene, of keeping intact the illusion of reality, by making our ears hear the siren's sound. If, even in a talkie, we do not accept the photograph as an officer, the scene means nothing to us, has no power to enter-

tain us. Making the policeman a fancy and the siren's blast a fact, is a mixture of warring elements, an anachronism which derides screen art.

But Hollywood laughs when you mention screen art. To it, making screen entertainment is strictly a business, as I have said. The business, however, is not being conducted by capable businessmen. The capable businessman shapes his product to conform to the demand of the market; his sole concern is to offer his customers what they will buy most readily, not to dictate to them what they shall buy. Hollywood does all the things the capable businessman carefully avoids doing; but it does them unconsciously. Never having understood why the public bought screen entertainment in the first place, being unaware of the element which made it marketable, it now, without knowing it, is trying to make over the market to conform to its product instead of studying the market to the end that it may give it what it will buy most readily.

Obviously the impression of movement the screen conveys to its audience is the chief factor in its commercial success. That the impression is due to the rapid projection of a series of pictures, in which there is no movement, is of no concern to the audience; it is none the less movement to the eye, even though it is the product of persistence of vision making an impression appear as an actuality. Our artist who painted the tree leaning before the wind, can inspire imagination to ascribe movement to the leaves, but only the screen can show us the leaves actually trembling, can create in us the illusion that the photographed leaves have movement.

WITH that as the starting point in their analysis of their product, one would think producers of screen entertainment would grasp the commercial wisdom of providing their market with as much movement as possible. In a screen offering there are two kinds of movement, physical and filmic, or objective and subjective. Of the two, filmic motion is the more important, if we differentiate them, as in reality physical motion is a part of filmic motion, the motion which makes the story interest continuous, which provides the maximum of entertainment in a given length of film. It is its entertainment content which determines the market value of a screen creation, consequently the first concern of the makers of pictures should be keeping intact the element upon which their commercial success depends.

Even though it embraces it, filmic motion is not dependent for its integrity upon physical motion. A motion picture is a symphony of movement, our emotions the strings upon which it is played. Our emotions provide the continuity. They follow the physical action of a lost hunter in seeking desperately to reach a height from which he hopes to get his bearings, but when he attains the height, stands still and gazes anxiously into the distance, only his eyes alive, our emotions do not pause as his physical action ceases. Our anxiety for his safety increases, for the crucial point has been reached; we know each hour is precious, that delay means peril to him and his sweetheart whom he must reach before disaster overtakes her.

We, so to speak, are as rigid as he is as he scans the valley beneath him; and our hearts leap with his as he spies a path leading down.

OUR emotions keep the filmic motion intact. Our brain tells us the hunter is in no danger, that he is an actor pretending to be a hunter, that there is a camera crew close to him, that soon he will be in a comfortable motor on his way home; that his sweetheart is not his sweetheart, is in no danger, probably is at home, entertaining friends at tea. But so completely has the illusion of reality been created, so sympathetically have our emotions responded to its urge, we give no heed to the realities our cold brain tries to force upon our attention; we ignore its efforts to lead us from the inner world of the screen creation into the outer world of our daily, commonplace, routine actualities.

It will be seen, then, that if a motion picture does not create an illusion of reality, it creates nothing; if it does not weave its elements into a continuous flow of filmic motion to keep our emotional reaction unchecked—in short, if it is not screen art—it cannot have entertainment value to assure its success at the box-office. And, as pointed out in a previous SPECTATOR, these discussions are based on commercial considerations, on picture-making as a business, and screen art becomes a factor in them because, as the business is one of manufacturing and marketing art creations, it should follow that the degree of artistic perfection the creations attain must be reflected in the financial return they earn.

W E have seen that the degree of merit a motion picture attains is determined by the degree in which the illusion of reality is developed and sustained. Obviously, the most disturbing factor in the integrity of an illusion must be the intrusion of reality. Another is the disturbance of the pictorial symphony's harmony by one element's bid for attention on its own account and at the expense of the rhythmic flow of the filmic motion. Let us first consider the one we place second.

To be complete, our interest in a screen offering must be continuous. If into a scene which has been a legitimate element in the forward flow of filmic motion, comes a woman wearing a hat so striking it attracts attention to itself apart from the remainder of the composition, we have an abrupt check to the filmic motion and a letdown in audience interest by the intrusion of alien considerations. Where, in heaven's name, did she get such a hat? Does she imagine she looks well in it? Orwhat a stunning hat! I wonder who designed it. I will get one like it. Multiply the hat by hair-dresses, gowns, sets, all sufficiently striking to attract attention to themselves, and you find many cases of pictures being deprived of their maximum entertainment possibilities by a lack of understanding of their true inwardness on the part of those who make them.

HE gravest intrusion is that of the reality of audible dialogue and mechanically reproduced sounds in this art of the *illusion* of reality. As we consider it, however,

we must remember we are regarding the art from the standpoint of the business interest of those who control it. Anyone with even the most rudimentary knowledge of the fundamentals of the art, is aware audible dialogue is a rank anachronism, a poison which would kill any art which lacks the great inherent strength screen art possesses. But a little dose of it can act as a stimulant to the forward progress of a screen story; the public will accept it, and is it good business expensively to strive for perfection when the public will be content with something less? When it is put in that way, we must accord dialogue a rightful place in screen entertainment even though we do not recognize it as a legitimate element of screen art.

But the talkie is not moderate in its use of dialogue, and equally immoderate is it with mechanically created sounds. Instead of using its vocal powers merely to expedite the progress of a story by enabling it to cut corners, and recognizing the right of the art to play the most important part in the story telling, the talkie goes to the extreme length of murdering the art and presenting its remains for our entertainment.

Previously we have established the fact that audible dialogue harms motion pictures by making their appeal intellectual instead of emotional, as is should be. Here we find it does further harm by virtue of its being an intrusion of reality in an art whose strength as entertainment is derived solely from its status as an art of the illusion of reality.

(In the next Spectator we will discuss the screen as a business.)

To those who wail about the burden of their income tax I recommend the philosophy of Una Merkel. "My!" she exclaimed as I encountered her immediately after she had squared her debt to Uncle Sam, "I never imagined a few years ago that I'd have the thrill of paying so much income tax." The thought behind her words constitutes a sermon in contentment.

A NEWSREEL I saw recently contained some shots of a mother Boston terrier and her litter of puppies, all suffering from mumps. When the mother was shown in close-up, her eyes half-closed, her whole attitude one of resigned dejection, a long drawnout, "Oh-o-o!" went up from the entire audience. At two more previews I caught the same scene and both times the audience reaction was the same exhibition of warm sympathy for the suffering little mother, audible reaction I never have known a human being to inspire. And still picture producers cannot get it into their thick skulls that a series of real dog pictures would have great box-office value.

NOT that I necessarily want to see another war picture, but if a producer is thinking of making another before they finally go out of fashion, I would recommend for his background material, I Saw Them Die, an extraordinary graphic record of an American young woman's experiences as nurse behind the World War lines. The author is Shirley Millard, and her diary was edited by

THE NEXT SPECTATOR WILL BE THE

ELEVENTH BIRTHDAY NUMBER—

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Adele Comandini, the gifted author of the Three Smart Girls screen story; publisher, Harcourt, Brace & Co. If you wish a livid bit of the war served up to you again, or if you appreciate beautiful writing for its own sake, I think you will enjoy this little literary meal which you can consume easily at one sitting.

EVER since Metro purchased The Shining Hour, in which Jane Cowl appeared at El Capitan Theatre, I have been waiting to see it on the screen. In order to be of the utmost service to Metro I herewith cast the picture for it: Joan Crawford in the Cowl role, Franchot Tone as the husband, Madge Evans as the wife. My renewed interest in the play was prompted by my having seen Madge in a recent picture. The wife in Shining Hour would give her something that long has been denied her—an opportunity to play a part she can get her teeth into, one that will enable her to demonstrate her ability. Few girls on the screen can match the charm of her personality, her inherent sweetness, but she is not cast in parts which permit her to exercise her talents as an actress.

THE desirablity of abolishing double bills and restoring the showing of pictures to a sound business basis is agitating exhibitors. Like all evils, this one should be attacked at its source. When producers cut out three-quarters of the audible dialogue their pictures now contain, and restore the camera to its rightful place as their medium of expression, they will be giving as much story value in one production as audiences now are getting in two. Talkie technique requires much more footage than it takes to tell a given story in cinematic technique.

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Some Late Previews

Great Job, Done Greatly

SEVENTH HEAVEN, 20th Century-Fox. Associate producer, Raymond Griffith; director, Henry King; play, Austin Strong; screen play, Melville Baker; photographer, Merritt Gerstad; music and lyrics, Lew Pollack and Sidney D. Mitchell; musical direction, Louis Silvers; film editor, Barbara MacLean; assistant director, Robert Webb. Cast: Simone Simon, James Stewart, Jean Hersholt, Gregory Ratoff, Gale Sondergaard, J. Edward Bromberg, John Qualen, Victor Kilian, Thomas Beck, Sig Rumann, Mady Christians, Rollo Lloyd, Rafaela Ottiano, George Renavent, Edward Keane, John Hamilton, Paul Porcasi, Will Stanton, Irving Bacon, Leonid Snogoff, Adrienne D'Ambricourt. Running time, 92 minutes.

SEVENTH HEAVEN, with all its emotional power, all the greatness of its simplicity and its elemental tug at our heart-strings, is born again on the screen. It was an audacious challenge the talkies made to match their technique with that of pre-talkie days in the treatment of a story the silent screen made into a picture that will live long in the memory of those who saw it. As a talkie it will rank high among its kind. The silent version ran twenty-two weeks at the Carthay Circle, its run being exceeded at that house only by What Price Glory? which ran for twenty-three weeks, three days. But if the talkie duplicates the success of the first version, it will not be a complete triumph for the new treatment.

Henry King's long experience in directing silent pictures is responsible for the greatest factor in making the new Seventh Heaven superlative entertainment. The two outstanding performances, of course, are those of James Stewart and Simone Simon, and practically all the values of both performances are brought out by the camera. The most eloquent speech of Stewart, the one which made the lump in my throat expand to the point of pain, was one he did not utter. He tries to tell Diane that he loves her, but chokes and says nothing. There are perhaps a dozen emotion-producing scenes in the picture in which a few words are spoken, but whose values are expressed in visual terms. The picture is the nearest approach we have had yet to the perfect blending of the old and the new technique, the silent and the talkie forms.

WELVILLE BAKER'S screen play is brilliant screen writing. He never loses sight of the camera, never strives obviously for emotional climaxes, always balances nicely the causes and the effects until he gives us a logical succession of events which maintains a smooth forward flow of filmic motion. And Henry King has molded the whole with the touch of a master. I always feel like applying the adjective "nice" to every picture Henry directs. He exhibits consistently the best of taste without sacrifice of dramatic values, and attains emotional power without sacrifice of sensitivity and delicacy in intimate and tender scenes. Seventh Heaven must rank among the finest demonstrations of sympathetic direction the screen has given us.

The picture is a triumph for James Stewart. He must be rated hereafter among the finest actors we have. In my review of the first picture in which I saw him, Rose

Marie (SPECTATOR January 18, 1936) I wrote: "What interests me in Stewart as a recruit from the stage is his intelligent and immediate grasp of the difference between stage and screen acting. He is a young fellow who will go a long way in pictures." His role in Marie was a brief one, but it revealed enough to make his brilliance in Seventh Heaven what we might have expected. Jimmie Stewart is a great actor. Simone Simon is an appealing Diane, a completely satisfactory piece of casting. Jean Hersholt is superb as always, John Qualen, J. Edward Bromberg, Victor Kilian completely competent in their various roles.

HE new Seventh Heaven runs ninety-two minutes. The old one was shorter. As the silent method of telling a story on the screen moved much faster than is possible for a talkie, there was more story in the play's first appearance on the screen. Not as much is made of the taxi driver which the late Albert Gran made so outstanding in the silent version, and which the loud, harsh voice of Gregory Ratoff makes the only disagreeable feature in the talkie. Missing also is the dramatic taxicab advance from Paris carrying thousands of soldiers to the front line trenches. And I liked the ending of the silent picture better than I do the talkie's. We saw Charlie Farrel fight his way through the armistice crowds, grope his way up the winding stairs to the seventh heaven, all the time crying the name of Diane until he felt her in his arms when his goal was reached. The emotional appeal of the sequence was terrific. In the talkie the situation is reversed. Diane returns to the seventh heaven and finds him waiting for her, an ending much weaker emotionally.

Another moment I looked for in the talkie disappointed me. I never will forget Janet Gaynor's "I, too, am a remarkable fellow!" In comparison, Simone's was weak. Nor will I forget Janet's close-up as she sat in the gutter, her back to a cartwheel, after a beating by her sister. Simone's lacked the appeal of Janet's.

However, although comparisons are suggested when the sound picture remakes a silent one, do not let anything I have written give you the impression that Seventh Heaven is not satisfactory screen entertainment. It is a great picture, has great production value, great performances and is directed greatly. It would have been improved by a continuous score instead of only bits here and there of the Diane theme. Continuous musical background is an essential of a dialogue picture, but the talkies are not old enough yet to know it.

Dialogue As It Should Be

QUALITY STREET, Radio production and RKO release. Starring Katharine Hepburn and Franchot Tone; from the play by J. M. Barrie; produced by Pandro S. Berman; directed by George Stevens; screen play by Mortimer Offner and Allan Scott; assistant director, Argyle Nelson; photographed by Robert DeGrasse; musical score by Roy Webb; art director, Hobe Erwin; costumes by Walter Plunkett; set dressings by Darrell Silvera; recorded by Clem Portman; edited by Henry Berman. Supporting cast: Eric Blore, Fay Bainter, Cora Witherspoon, Estelle Winwood, Florence Lake,

Helena Grant, Bonita Granville, Clifford Severn, Sherwood Bailey, Roland Varno, Joan Fontaine, William Bakewell. Running time, 85 minutes.

J. M. BARRIE dipped his pen in ink of a century and a quarter ago and sketched a group of characters which Radio presents in a series of animated Old English prints. Quality Street is a delightful picture, a dainty, delicate thing, gentle in its humor and revealing vast respect for the customs and manners of its times. Visually beautiful, rich in literary value, leisurely in pace, it comes to the screen as a bit of old lace with a suggestion of lavender. Quality Street is a gossipy thoroughfare with much subdued chattering about neighbors and spying between stealthily parted curtains. Barrie's humor courses up and down it and none of it has been overlooked in the excellently written screen play of Mortimer Offner and Allan Scott. Reflecting the psychology of a bygone era, it will require of its audience a mental readjustment which may limit its appeal to those who can be entertained by a mixture of three parts atmosphere to two parts action.

To George Stevens, director, goes the major credit for the satisfaction the picture will give. Not in a long time have I seen another production in which the director's contribution plays such a dominant part. Nor has any other production so vividly demonstrated the value of intelligent direction of dialogue. I have written a great deal about the harm done pictures by loud dialogue. It is the most potent mood-destroying agency the microphone has injected in screen entertainment, robbing scenes of the element of intimacy from which they draw all their strength. What all my arguments have aimed at is exemplified in Steven's direction of this picture.

QUALITY STREET has little action and no great moments. It is a placid recital of trivialities affecting a generation whose only bequest to ours is in the form of traditions which interest us solely because we deem them as manifestations of people who lived in a narrow age. In themselves the manifestations have little entertainment value for us, therefore, when depicted on the screen, it must be the manner of their presentation which catches and holds our attention. We must not have the feeling that we are witnessing from a distance something that happened long ago to people in whom we have no interest. We must be drawn into the midst of the happenings so completely we feel we are participating in them and not having them explained to us.

By his direction of the dialogue Stevens gives us this essential feeling of intimacy. Not a voice is raised throughout the entire length of the picture; the characters speak only to oneanother, never at any time conveying the impression they are endeavoring to project their voices to an audience. This has more significance than merely a lack of unnecessary noise would have. Its cinematic value has no relation to a volume of sound as such. What gives it its cinematic value is the feeling of intimacy it creates. When such trivialities are being discussed by people in whom we are not interested, it entertains us solely by virtue of putting us in the postion of being eavesdroppers listening to conversations not in-

tended for our ears. Barrie's stage play, of course, had to create something of the same impression, but the limitations of the stage did not permit it to develop the feeling of intimacy possible only to the screen. The picture pleases us by making us feel superior to the people on the screen; we are getting an intimate view of their private affairs and they are unaware of it. All screen scenes in which dialogue is directed intelligently will create the same feeling.

ANOTHER result of conversationally delivered dialogue must always be a collection of practically perfect performances. Loud dialogue, on the other hand, always suggests the actor. A case in point is Gregory Ratoff's performance in Seventh Heaven, also reviewed in this SPECTATOR. As he has done in every picture in which I have seen him, in this otherwise perfect Century production Ratoff shouts his lines in his harsh, unpleasant voice, thus introducing an alien element which disturbs the unity of his scenes. To the initiated it looks like an effort to steal each scene instead of being a sympathetic contribution toward assuring it complete harmony. None of the Quality Street players disturbs the harmony of scenes by attracting individual attention. Katharine Hepburn is delightful in her dual role as herself and her spurious niece. Franchot Tone is graceful and easy in a part which fits him neatly. Fay Bainter also stands out, as does Eric Blore in another of his capital comedy characterizations.

Hobe Erwin is to be credited with doing an artistic job in bringing the period of the story to us in such an attractive visual form. Robert DeGrasse's photography also is one of the big assets of the production. Here again the direction comes in for mention. The background inspired grouping of people to attain highly artistic effects. In too many pictures artistic compositions are broken too promptly into shorter shots, thus denying us the full effect of their beauty as a whole. Stevens does not commit this mistake. He gives us frequent shots in which the whole composition is retained even if there are but two people in the scenes. In fact, he makes Quality Street easy on both the ears and the eyes of the audience.

Much to Recommend It

WAIKIKI WEDDING, Paramount. Produced by Arthur Hornblow, Jr.; director, Frank Tuttle; assistant director, Richard Harlan; screen play, Frank Butler and Don Hartman, Walter DeLeon and Francis Martin; based on a story by Frank Butler and Don Hartman; sound, Gene Merritt and Louis Mesenkop; film editor, Paul Weatherwax; art directors, Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; photographer, Karl Struss, A.S.C.; special photographic effects, Farciot Edouart, A.S.C.; Hawaiian exteriors by Robert C. Bruce; dance director, Leroy Prinz; costumes, Edith Head; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros; words and music, Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger; orchestrations by Victor Young; arrangements by Al Siegel and Arthur Franklin; SWEET LEILANI, by Harry Owens; Hawaiian lyrics by Jimmy Lowell. Cast: Bing Crosby, Bob Burns, Martha Raye, Shirley Ross, George Barbier, Leif Erikson, Grady Sutton, Granville Bates, Anthony Quinn, Mitchell Lewis, George Regas, Nick Lukats, Prince Lei Lani, Maurice Liu, Raquel Echeverria.

0 W the whole, worthwhile. Its visual beauty alone is worth the price of admission. The langorous Hawaiian atmosphere envelopes it and accentuates the haunting quality of the native music. The wizard Paramount

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craftsmen recreated pieces of the island scenery and Karl Struss made them warmly rich by the quality of his photography. Robert C. Bruce, another master cameraman, journeyed to Hawaii and brought back scenes of surpassing beauty that dignifies photographic art. Paramount did not stint itself in filling the screen with beautiful maidens and manly young men, in staging dances which express physically the rhythmic beat of Hawaiian strings and are accompanied by vocal interpretation of appropriate songs.

Add to all this the presence of Bing Crosby, one of the screen's most capable actors and pleasing singers; Shirley Ross with her charming personality and equally charming singing voice; Bob Burns with a pleasant little pig instead of his unpleasant bazooka, and a story which manages well enough to hold the whole thing together, and we have a film attraction strong enough to be entertaining in spite of a few annoying qualities. Music, of course, dominates, and rarely have vocal and instrumental numbers been interwoven more alluringly in a succession of such beautiful scenes.

Wy failure to include Martha Raye among the picture's assets is due to my personal preferences in the way of comedy. She has talent, but Paramount is not developing it. Acting ability might be summed up as proficiency in presenting a series of characterizations unlike one-another. Martha gave one in her first picture and has repeated it in the others, even though in her drunken scene in Rhythm on the Range she revealed a fine sense of comedy. In that picture her every turn was applauded loudly by the preview audience. At the Waikiki Wedding preview her applause was scattered and lukewarm. She screams a song in a voice that will rasp the stoutest nerves. By its manner of presenting her, Paramount is destroying what might be developed into a real box-office asset.

I thought his bazooka finally would extinguish Bob Burns' cinematic light, and I applaud heartily the substitution of the pig even though I regret their having called the animal Wafford. Every time his name was pronounced I thought I was being paged. For the first time, however, Bob's performance completely pleased me. His personality is an asset. I have not met him, but I gather from his screen performances that he is a decent fellow worth knowing. An actor who can create that feeling has half his performance in the bag before he starts to work. The chief merit of George Barbier's performance is its brevity. Another two minutes of his shouting of lines at the top of his voice would have the audience jittery. I have seen Grady Sutton in many productions and each time he has impressed me. I know of no one else on the screen who can match his cleverness at appearing dumb. Leif Erikson makes a brief part one of the highlights.

Frank Tuttle's direction makes good use of the various elements of the production except in those scenes in which the dialogue was allowed to make too much noise.

Ludwig's Good Direction

HER HUSBAND LIES, Paramount release of B. P. Schulberg production. Directed by Edward Ludwig; screen play by Wallace Smith and Eve Greene; story by Oliver H. P. Garrett; photograph-

ed by Leon Shamroy; art direction by Albert D'Agostino; musical direction by Boris Morros; original songs by Burton Lane and Ralph Freed; set decorations by George T. Nicoll; film editor, Robert Bischoff; costumes by Edith Head; sound recording by Jack Goodrich; assistant director, Ray Lissner. Cast: Gail Patrick, Ricardo Cortez, Akim Tamiroff, Tom Brown, Louis Calhern, June Martel, Dorothy Peterson, Jack LaRue, Ralf Harolde, Bradley Page, Ray Walker. Running time, 75 minutes.

WHAT the name of the picture was I cannot recall, but the direction Edward Ludwig gave it prompted me to place him on my list of young directors who were destined to do big things on the screen. Since then I have watched his work with growing conviction that I was right in my estimate of his ability. The forward movement of the story, its mounting drama and the excellence of the performances make Her Husband Lies decidedly worthwhile. The film industry through the years has taught the public so assiduously to look for stellar names on marquees before entering picture theatres, the lack of such names in the cast of the Schulberg picture will not put it among the season's great box-office smashes, but it can be recommended without reservation as an engrossing piece of entertainment even though its atmosphere is unsavory and most of its characters gamblers and gunmen.

Ludwig's direction keeps the story intact, causes it to be a tightly knit succession of believable scenes building to a dramatic ending. But the picture is free from obvious efforts to produce dramatic effects. For all its outside-the-law episodes the story is told with the same simplicity that might be applied to a quiet rural drama. Ben Schulberg has given it the kind of complete production we have learned to expect from him. The atmosphere of the story did not tempt him to disturb the filmic pattern by the intrusion of the weird settings which appear in so many pictures to divert our attention from the story.

THE performances in Her Husband Lies also fit neatly into the pattern, and under wise direction have attained the quality that always makes screen performances perfect—the quality of naturalness which never suggests the actor. The atmosphere of the story has little to recommend it, but the manner in which it is told makes it worthwhile as screen entertainment, and credit for the manner of its telling goes to its direction. Oliver Garrett's dramatic story was made into a consistent screen play by Wallace Smith and Eve Greene. Of course, there is far too much dialogue, but if our attendance at picture houses were prompted only by pictures with the right amount of dialogue, we would spend far more time at home than we do now.

There are three nice young women in the picture, Gail Patrick, Dorothy Peterson and June Martel, who bring fresh air into the sordid atmosphere. Each of them does splendidly. Four of the finest performances you could hope to find in any one picture are those of Ricardo Cortez, Akim Tamiroff, Tom Brown and Louis Calhern. The cast is sprinkled liberally with minor characters who deserve as much credit for their bits as the others do for their parts. Albert D'Agostino's art direction and Leon Shamroy's photography also are big contributions.

Many Virtues and a Big Fault

SWING HIGH, SWING LOW, Paramount release of Arthur Hornblow, Jr., production. Stars Carole Lombard and Fred Mac-Murray. Directed by Mitchell Leisen; screen play by Virginia Van Upp and Oscar Hammerstein II; based on play by George Manker Watters and Arthur Hopkins; assistant director, Edgar Anderson; costumes, Travis Banton; sound, Earl Hayman and Don Johnson; film editor, Eda Warren; art direction, Hans Dreier and Ernst Fegte; special photographic effects, Farciot Edouart; musical direction, Boris Morros; compositions and arrangements, Victor Young and Phil Boutelje; vocal supervision, Al Siegel; original songs, Ralph Rainger, Leo Robin, Sam Coslow and Al Siegel, Burton Lane and Ralph Freed, Julian Oliver; photographed by Ted Tetzlaff. Supporting cast: Charles Butterworth, Jean Dixon, Dorothy Lamour, Harvey Stephens, Cecil Cunningham, Charlie Arnt, Franklin Pangborn, Anthony Quinn, Bud Flanagan, Charles Judels. Running time, 92 minutes.

Of first importance to a picture from a box-office standpoint is the impression the viewer takes away with him from the film theatre. In the creation of the impression the story's ending plays an important part as the viewer remembers longest what he saw last. The ending, after all, is just about the whole story, events preceding it being but steps leading to a logical result. The story value of a lover's quarrel is not the quarrel itself; it is its results, its effect on people in whom we have become interested.

Swing High, Swing Low interests us primarily in the affairs of Carole Lombard and Fred MacMurray. We fall in love with Carole as soon as we see her; she is a good fellow, ingenuous, good to look at. Fred is a little too fresh when we first meet him, but his improvement meets our indulgence half way and we rather like him. He is an irresponsible lad, one who would drift aimlessly without an anchor to windward in the person of a girl like Carole. But he can play a trumpet in a manner which in his hereafter should make him the logical successor to Gabriel, who by now must be getting quite old. And then there are the always dependable Jean Dixon as Carole's loyal friend, Cecil Cunningham as an understanding night club proprietor, Dorothy Lamour's singing and acting and Charlie Butterworth in a part which permits him to be almost sane, thereby becoming the best part he has had in a long time. Some day some producer is going to be wise enough to cast Charlie in a deeply sympathetic role and he will prove a sensation.

ADD to the above personnel some opening shots giving us intimate views of the Panama Canal photographed with rare artistry; an abundance of tropical atmosphere glamorously sustained by the expert direction of Michell Leisen, fascinating music, clever comedy and pretty girls, the whole blended into genuine entertainment. The screen is crowded with life through which the thread of the story runs in a straight line which clever direction keeps taut and is responsible also for consistently excellent performances by all the principals as well as by those to whom bits were assigned. There is nothing lacking in the richly visual production Paramount provided nor in the camera work of Ted Tetzlaff and Farciot Edouart.

For the first three-quarters of the footage the picture proceeds joyously and is giving us a good time. True, we cannot understand why Fred does not take Carole, his wife, with him from Panama to New York when he sets forth to conquer the metropolis with his trumpetplaying, but we refuse to permit it to worry us greatly. But when he permits Dorthy Lamour, who has preceded him to New York, to lure him into her coils and fail to keep his promise to send for Carole; when he becomes a drunken, unkempt bum, we become disgusted with him and with the picture. The last impression we carry away is one of dissatisfaction in spite of the favorable impression the greater part of the film had created.

D_{RUNKENNESS} is a poor motivating element in a screen story. We measure the entertainment quality of a motion picture by the degree in which our interest and liking have been enlisted for the hero and heroine. We want all the actions of both to be their conscious reactions to the situations in which they find themselves. Drunkenness, in itself disgusting when it makes the hero a sodden wreck, has little value as a story element because what a drunken man does leaves us with a feeling of being cheated, that but for the accident of drunkenness he would have acted differently. Certainly if I were writing a screen story I would deem myself a poor craftsman if I could not contrive a more logical motive than drunkenness to explain the action of the hero. Swing High, Swing Low fades out on a painfully maudlin scene in which the efforts of Carole and Fred to raise it to emotional heights made me feel sorry for them.

The performances of both of them, however, are excellent. MacMurray is coming along rapidly. His appeal is to both the male and female picture trade, which makes complete his conquest of any audience. One can speak of Carole only in superlative terms. She is composed entirely of cinematic talents and uses each of them in every performance. She can express more with a sigh than most actresses can with a sustained speech. I agree that Luise Rainer deserved recognition for her fine work in Ziegfeld, but she had everything to work with, the emotional possibilities of her telephone scene having been developed by the story and presented to her on a platter. My opinion is that the Academy award for the best performance last year by an actress should have gone to Carole for characterization in My Man Godfrey. It was purely her own creation. Inherently crazy in conception, the part left everything to the person playing it. There was no building to her scenes, no situations handed to her ready-made, no emotional values enabling her to get off with a flying start. To me it was the most brilliantly sustained performance of a year of many brilliant performances. And in this new Paramount picture Carole again is brilliant, her singing, a new talent revealed for the first time, making her even more delightful than usual.

Eyebrows Are Coming Down

PERSONAL PROPERTY, Metro release of John W. Considine, Jr., production. Co-stars Jean Harlow and Robert Taylor. Directed by

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W. S. Van Dyke; features Reginald Owen and Una O'Connor; screen play by Hugh Mills and Ernst Vajda; from a play by H. M. Harwood; musical score by Franz Waxman; photographed by William Daniels; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; film editor, Ben Lewis; assistant director, Dolph Zimmer. Supporting cast: Henrietta Crosman, E. E. Clive, Cora Witherspoon, Marla Shelton, Forrester Harvey, Lionel Braham, Barnett Parker. Running time, 88 minutes.

AFTER his impressive appearance opposite Garbo in the dignified and important Camille, it is a sad comedown for Bob Taylor to be seen in such a poor thing as this. Obviously it was turned out in a hurry on the Hollywood principle: "Get the money today and let tomorrow take care of itself." Personal Property is an indifferent rehash of an indifferent British farce-comedy of situations, its appeal being in their comedy. W. S. Van Dyke directed it apparently in a hurry and with his mind on something else. The picture strikes only one new note: Jean Harlow's eyebrows have slipped back to their original position.

This eyebrow replacement again demonstrates the Power of the Press. A few months ago Phil Scheuer and I threatened to join hands and use our respective publications in a war on the increasingly upward trend of the eyebrows of the young women of the screen. At our first council-of-war we munched Brown Derby food and determined to delay our opening attack to see if the threat would not prove sufficient. So it proved to be. Eyebrows are coming down and our screen girls are losing their mechanically contrived, startled look. Again the power of the press has been demonstrated.

There are other things in *Personal Property*, some of them highly amusing, but the whole thing is scarcely worthwhile.

Undeveloped Possibilities

WHEN LOVE IS YOUNG, Universal. Associate producer, Robert Presnell; director, Hal Mohr; original, Eleanore Griffin; screen play, Eve Greene and Joseph Fields; photographer, Jerome Ash; special effects, John P. Fulton; original songs, Jimmy McHugh and Harold Anderson; musical director, Charles Previn; art director, Jack Otterson; stage number design, John Harkrider. Cast: Virginia Bruce, Kent Taylor, Walter Brennan, Greta Meyer, Christian Rub, William Tannen, Jean Rogers, Sterling Holloway, Nydia Westman, David Oliver, Jack Smart, Laurie Douglas, Franklin Pangborn.

QUITE conventional in all departments. It is Hal Mohr's first fling at direction and gives evidence of his having concerned himself more with the mechanics of his script than with its human possibilities, a treatment we logically could expect from one making his initial bow as a director. Universal has given the picture a handsome production and the photography of Jerome Ash makes it visually attractive. A particularly striking setting is one designed by John Harkrider. As entertainment, however, When Love Is Young is quite ordinary despite the studio's honest attempt to develop its possibilities.

One of its weaknesses is the characterization given the leading man, played by Kent Taylor. The story concerns his romance with Virginia Bruce. A romance is acceptable entertainment only in the degree in which it makes logical the eventual marriage of the two parties to it. Kent is characterized as a disagreeable, snarling, unreasonable young man who shouts insults at the girl with

whom he is in love until the audience would have been pleased more if Virginia had batted him over the head with an ax-handle instead of going into his arms.

The story is as meaty as the ordinary run of its kind—the home-town girl who goes to the city and makes good on the stage in the Big City. Its lack of entertainment is due to the manner of its treatment.

F_{OR} instance, on a crowded dance floor an intimate conversation is carried on in tones which must have carried the words to the ears of at least half the other couples. You see the same thing in many pictures, a revelation of stupidity which is becoming one of my pet peeves. The argument used to justify it is that it provides movement, an argument based on cinematic ignorance, as such a scene checks the movement of the story. Filmic motion is in no way related to physical motion. Hearing a boy and girl in loud tones exchanging confidences which we know in real life they would whisper to one another, checks the forward flow of the story by introducing an element which disturbs the continuity of our absorbtion in it. There would be more real motion in showing a boy and girl standing perfectly still in a romantic setting, their hands gradually getting closer until hers rests in his. The average director, however, thinks the only way to give a romantic scene what he considers motion is to have the girl climb a telephone pole and send the boy up after her to grasp her hand.

Another disappointing feature of the Universal picture is the scant treatment given the Harkrider setting. We get one comprehensive glimpse of it. Its beauty is breath-taking; it is one of the rarest visual treats the screen has given us, but just as our eyes are beginning to grasp the components of such a charming whole, there is a cut to a fragment to bring us closer to some action, and thereafter we must be content with peeks at various bits of it. Keeping all, or at least nearly all, the composition before us for the duration of the sequence would have been wiser film editing. However, we saw enough of the setting to gain an impression of what valuable contributions John Harkrider can make to the visual beauty of screen offerings.

SOME fault can be found with the nature of some of the performances, but none with the manner in which all the members of the cast responded to direction. Virginia Bruce again demonstrates what a talented young woman she is. It is not her fault that in the early sequences she lays the agony on a bit too thickly, nor can we quarrel with her because of her failure to subject Taylor to the ax-handle treatment. She is beautiful to behold, has a singing voice of rich quality and uses it intelligently. What Taylor has to do he does well. Walter Brennan gives his usual skilful performance, but toward the end it is his misfortune to be dragged into scenes to supply comedy touches where none should be. I was glad to see Christian Rub in an important role. A highly talented character actor, he is given too few opportunities to display his wares. Other who deserve mention are Greta Meyer, William Tannen, Sterling Holloway, Nydia Westman, Jack Smart and Franklin Pangborn.

I hope I have not conveyed the impression that When Love Is Young is a total loss. My complaint is that it could have been much better than it is, but perhaps it has quite enough merit to justify your seeing it.

Reviews by Paul Jacobs

Not Clever, But Cute

GIRL OVERBOARD, Universal picture and release. Directed by Sidney Salkow; associate producer, Robert Presnell; original by Sarah Elizabeth Rodger; screen play by Tristram Tupper; photographed by Ira Morgan; sound supervisor, Homer G. Tasker; special effects by John P. Fulton; film editor, Philip Cahn; musical direction by Charles Previn; art director, Jack Otterson; associate art director, Ralph DeLacy. Cast: Gloria Stuart, Walter Pidgeon, Billy Burrud, Hobart Cavanaugh, Gerald Oliver-Smith, Sidney Blackmer, Jack Smart, David Oliver, Charlotte Wynters, Russell Hicks, R. E. O'Connor, Edward McNamara. Running time, 58 minutes.

A FLAMING sea-disaster, a relentless reporter and a corsage-pin murder are not quite enough to pull this one into the upper brackets. But Girl Overboard is perfect fodder for the unsophisticated. Among its many attractions is the presence of Walter Pidgeon, unquestionably one of America's finest actors. His interpretation of the clean-cut, warmly human D.A. is the highlight of this film.

And certainly far from least important is the winsomly sincere personality of Gloria Stuart. Her appeal was graphically expressed by the fervent comment of my preview companion, a young man of distinct taste. When I asked him how he liked the picture, his succinct comeback was: "Boy, would I like to meet her!" So would I.

Particulary difficult is the job of Billy Burrud. I am one of those monsters who delight in tearing child actors limb from limb. His big scene, where he is pulled screaming from his dead mother, brought a big, warm lump into my throat. Hobart Cavanaugh, of course, is his utterly reliable self. Some day some bright producer will let Mr. Cavanaugh do something other than meek husband sleuthing detectives; and said producer will find he has long overlooked a real bet.

ANOTHER favorite of mine, that slick old meanie Sidney Blackmer, brings us another epicurean taste of pure and delicate villainy. Mr. Blackmer is seen much too seldom. Gerold Oliver-Smith does a cleverly light-tempoed burlesque on Hollywood's idea of what a well-trained butler should be like. You will see Mr. Oliver-Smith frequently, I venture to predict. Vivid bits are supplied by Jack Smart, David Oliver, Russell Hicks, and Edward McNamara. And since no murder mystery seems complete without R. E. O'Conner lurking somewhere in the background, he again assumes a badge and flat feet with the ease of habit. Although she appears but briefly, Charlotte Wynters makes her contribution vividly effective.

Given the competent scripting of Tristram Tupper and the professionally smooth direction of Sidney Salkow, Girl Overboard is unimportant but compact entertainment.

Color Can't Compete

REFLECTION, Featurettes, Inc. From Liberty Magazine short short story, AT A PERFORMANCE OF PAGLIACCI, by Edwin Baird; produced by George S. Fox; directed by Tommy Atkins; screen play by Dale Armstrong; photography, Max Stengler; musical director, Lee Zahler; color director, Roy Klaffki; film editor, Holbrook Todd; sound engineer, Glen Glenn; ballet direction by Theodore Kosloff. Cast: Esther Ralston, Pierre Watkin and Brooks Benedict.

A CORKING idea is often spoiled by losing the idea in its execution. That a series of "short-short" stories would make pungent novelty subjects is true and an excellent way of inducing the return of single features. But Producer George S. Fox made the mistake of using color and of allowing its scope to interfere with the story.

We have the action taking place during a performance of *Pagliacci*; the vivid swirl of color, the confusion of inter-splashed patterns of movement confuse us to the point of losing both the story and our interest. Unable to focus our attention on either *Pagliacci* or the tribulations of Esther Ralston who, by the way, gives a brilliant performance, we wait for the final sign instead of the denouemont.

However, the inner idea is sound; and Mr. Fox has my vote of thanks for a pleasurable anticipation of new filmic entertainment.

Naish Is a Natural

SONG OF THE CITY, Metro picture and release. Directed by Errol Taggart; produced by Lucien Hubbard and Michael Fessier; original story and screen play by Michael Fessier; music by Dr. William Axt; lyrics by Gus Kahn; recording director, Douglas Shearer; associates, Eddie Imazu and Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photographed by Leonard Smith; film editor, John B. Rogers; assistant director, Marvin Stuart. Cast: Margaret Lindsay, Jeffrey Dean, J. Carrol Naish, Nat Pendleton, Stanley Morner, Marla Shelton, Inez Palange, Charles Judels, Edward Norris, Fay Helm, Frank Puglia. Running time, 68 minutes.

JUST what Song of the City has to do with a song of the city I couldn't find out. But Song of the City is a pleasing song of the sea. We spend most of our running time in the tangy atmosphere of the fishing fleet at San Francisco. Little Italy with its lilting tempo lives joyously and gives us its vivid patterns. We spend our emotions on the tribulations of Papa Ramandi and his bambinos. And we enjoy ourselves hugely.

Out of the many impressions I carried away, two remain most vivid. The first is a glow of pleasure I derived from the exceptional performance of J. Carrol Naish. Always tops, this trouper carries away the first half dozen places for acting. Whatever is left may be amiably divided among the cast. My second impression is of the artistry displayed by director Errol Taggart. His creation of atmosphere is splendid.

It occurs to me that I may have planted the idea that Song of the City would have cracked in two if Naish

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were not in it. Let me hasten to say that this class B histronically is impregnable; and the mounting quite in keeping with the reputation M.G.M. has built around its technical departments. Expert editing by John B. Rogers and a smoothly progressive and forcefully thematic story by Michael Fessier complete an entirely efficient job. Song of the City is not a great picture or even an outstanding one. But see it if you get the chance. It is thoroughly enjoyable.

Mushy But Masterful

GIRL LOVES BOY, Grand National release of B. F. Zeidman production. Harold Lewis production manager; directed by Duncan Mansfield; original story by Karl Brown and Hinton Smith; screen play by Duncan Mansfield and Carroll Graham; photographed by Edward Snyder; art direction by Edward Jewell; sound recorded by Ferol Redd; Abe Meyer, musical supervisor; special effects by Jack Corgrove; assistant director, Gaston Glass. Cast: Eric Linden, Cecilia Parker, Roger Imhof, Dorothy Peterson, Pedro de Cordoba, Bernadene Hayes, Otto Hoffman, Patsy O'Connor, Rollo Lloyd, Buster Phelps, Spencer Charters, Sherwood Bailey, Edwin Mordant, Jameson Thomas and John T. Murray. Running time, 75 minutes.

WHEN Duncan Mansfield and Carroll Graham translated the original story by Karl Brown and Hinton Smith, they bore down too heavily on the heartstrings, giving us snatches of hokum in place of a uniform emotional appeal. Other than this misfortune, Girl Loves Boy is almost without blemish. As a director, Duncan Mansfield is more than capable, displaying a comprehension far above his ability to discriminate in story values. I hope he leaves the writing to the scripters and concentrates on the field he knows best.

Before we discuss the other elements of Girl Loves Boy, I feel we should understand the principle that so completely governs the audience reaction to emotion. In brief, an audience can absorb only a specific amount of emotional strain. Beyond that limit, emotional emphasis goes stale, unless it is tempered by an alternate tempo. But best of all approaches is the continued emotional intensity built so smoothly that the final emotional peak is merely a consummation. It is the over-emphasis of pathos or any other impression that destroys the effect it aims at. Too much sugar or too much salt can spoil any food. And the emotions become hungry and must be fed just as much as any appetite.

Coming back to Girl Loves Boy, you will notice when you see it that the acting is distinctly uniform in its excellence. No more important factor exists in the force of audience appeal. From Eric Linden to John T. Murray, the illusion is expertly maintained. So although Girl Loves Boy cannot be called first rate, it will give you seventy-five minutes of interest.

Kibbee Gets His Man

JIM HANVEY—DETECTIVE, Republic. Associate producer, Joseph Krumgold; director, Phil Rosen; story, Octavus Roy Cohen; screen play, Joseph Krumgold and Olive Cooper; adaptation, Eric Taylor and Cortland Fitzsimmons; photographer, Jack Marta; musical supervision, Harry Grey; film editor, William Morgan. Casts: Guy Kibbee, Tom Brown, Lucie Kaye, Catharine Doucet, Edward S. Brophy, Edward Gargan, Helen Jerome Eddy, Theodor Von Eltz, Kenneth Thomson, Howard Hickman, Oscar Apfel, Wade Boteler,

Robert Emmett Keane, Robert E. Homans, Harry Tyler, Frank Darien, Charles Williams.

CONSIDERING the unfortunate fact that it took five people to write this story, Jim Hanvey—Detective is better than I expected it to be, for despite its thin logic and haphazard progression this Republic offering has many minutes of pungent entertainment. And although director Phil Rosen passed up some of his best bets, he has managed to inject an intermittent flavor which carries the weight of the weaknesses.

Another strengthening factor is the adaptation of Eric Taylor and Courtland Fitzsimmons. Guy Kibbee is particularly well cast as the keen hayseed whose kindly philosophy is no hinderance to his ruthless ability to ferret crime. As usual, Tom Brown gives us a sincere portrait of a nice boy, and Lucie Kaye is sweet enough for any nice boy, but it is Catharine Doucet who captivated the preview audience. Her deft exaggeration of type won for her continuous response.

Edward S. Brophy and Edward Gargan bring up an interesting question. Their work is always so uniformly good and always so uniformly the same that I cannot help but wonder why some producer does not take a chance and allow them to do something else, just to find out how good they really are. The same question goes for Helen Jerome Eddy. She is always convincing as the unhappy drudge. She surely would be just as good as a happy lady.

I seem full of questions. Theodor Von Eltz brings up another one. Why isn't he given his former prominence? Not as young as his first success, Von Eltz is finely proportioned, handsome, well possessed and a captivating actor. I always look forward to his bits and I never have been disappointed. And in keeping with the old-guard tradition, the supporting cast of Kenneth Thompson, Howard Hickman, Oscar Apfel, Wade Boteler and the rest of these past masters give Jim Hanvey—Detective its otherwise not too strong illusion of reality. Do not look for this picture; but there is no need to avoid it.

Has Its Moments

CALIFORNIA STRAIGHT AHEAD, Universal. Directed by Arthur Lubin; produced by Trem Carr; associate producer, Paul Malvern; original story by Herman Boxer; screen play by Scott Darling; photographed by Harry Neumann, A.S.C.; art direction, E. R. Hickson; sound supervisor, Homer G. Tasker; musical director, Charles Previne; film editors, Charles Craft and Erma Horseley. Cast: John Wayne, Louise Latimer, Robert McWade, Theodore von Eltz, Tully Marshall, Emerson Treacy, Harry Allen, Leroy Mason, Grace Goodall, Olaf Hytton, Monty Vandergrift.

Occasionally we see a picture which brings us Straight Ahead is an excellent example. It is too bad the ingredients of audience-appeal are not more carefully studied and more comprehensively applied. For California Straight Ahead, an original by Herman Boxer, has all the requirements of distinctive entertainment. And had scripter Scott Darling made his dialogue more convincing and director Arthur Lubin caught up a few more of the looser edges, this not-too-good B would take its place with the best.

John Wayne gives a competent portrayal of the twofisted trucker who gets what he goes after. It is interesting to note that Wayne seems destined to Big Trail epics. The Big Trail, as you will remember, gives us the saga of an heroic cross-country trek. California Straight Ahead repeats the tempo with gas wagons instead of covered wagons.

Mary Porter, a newcomer, shows definite promise; her work is not yet smooth but there are moments which show that Miss Porter is to be heard from later. Theodore Von Eltz is his usual flawless self; and that grand old trouper, Tully Marshall, gives us the kind of bits that once made

Hollywood great.

Emerson Treacy is another we see too little of; his work is consistently good. First brought to the attention of screenland by his ability with the Henry Duffy players when he teamed with Gay Seabrook, Treacy has been neglected unfairly. In the same category is Leroy Mason. An amazingly versatile athlete, he personifies the out-door type. He is an all-around grand fellow, and I always am elated when I see his name on the credits. But for me, the high point of California Straight Ahead is the brilliant characterization of Robert McWade. His irascible "Boss Corrigan" is a gem and typical of this old master. Others of significances are Harry Allen, Grace Goodall, Olaf Hytton and Monty Vandergrift.

In summary, then, California Straight Ahead has moments of brilliance which do not compensate for its weakness. But you could do a great deal worse with your money.

Reviews by CAllan Hersholt

The Army Grows

MIDNIGHT TAXI, 20th-Fox production and release. Directed by Eugene Forde; associate producer, Milton H. Feld; screen play by Lou Breslow and John Patrick; based on the story by Borden Chase; photographed by Barney McGill; art director, Hans Peters; assistant director, William Eckhardt; film editor, Al De Gaetano; costumes by Herschel; sound by S. C. Chapman and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction by Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Brian Donlevy, Frances Drake, Alan Dinehart, Sig Rumann, Gilbert Roland, Harold Huber, Paul Stanton, Lon Cheney, Jr., Russell Hicks, Regis Toomey. Running time, 72 minutes.

To Hollywood's large and steadily-increasing army of B-class G-man productions is added Midnight Taxi, a Century offering superior in some respects to many of its predecessors and quite likely to gain approval from the majority of its spectators. At no time bearing even slight suggestion of notable cinematic art and disclosing none of the qualities that spell memorable screen entertainment, which is customary of this type of photoplay, it will achieve the purpose for which it has been fabricated. Very satisfactorily will it hold the secondary place of a double-feature program in any theatre, and the commercial outcome will cause its producers to give us at least one more like it.

Recorded with conviction, the *Taxi* story has a wealth of exciting incidents, none of which bears the imprint of being contrived merely to keep the story going—a rarity in films of this sort. Thematically conventional, present-

ing familiar situations and characters, the picture reveals direction that is considerably above the average. Eugene Forde's interpretation of the Lou Breslow-John Patrick script, based upon a Borden Chase story, merits acclaim as a thoroughly creditable job. Again displayed in his work are notably good screen sense, sound knowledge of entertainment values and complete understanding of the material on hand. The picture moves briskly, vigorously and smoothly, sustaining suspense admirably. It offers some unusually fine photography, credited to Barney Mc-Gill, a master of his profession.

Midnight Taxi is distinguished for a splendid portrayal by the dynamic Brian Donlevy, one of the most engaging he yet has given. If Century handled Donlevy's career with more wisdom, he might be its leading male box-office attraction. He appears in far too many pictures, all of them of B classification, and almost invariably is cast as a G-man. If such treatment continues, his screen life will be short. Given four carefully-selected stories a year, something besides G-man material, he would, I believe, attain a place among the industry's box-office leaders.

Frances Drake's performance is excellent, and convincing work is done by Alan Dinehart, Harold Huber, Gilbert Roland, Sig Rumann and the others. Particularly fine is that sterling actor, Regis Toomey, seen too infrequently. Milton Feld, associate producer, has provided noteworthy guidance.

With Thanks to Herbert

THAT MAN'S HERE AGAIN, Warners release of a First National production. Produced by Bryan Foy; directed by Louis King; screen play by Lillie Hayward; from story by Ida A. R. Wylie; photographed by Warren Lynch; Harold McLernon, film editor; Esdras Hartley, art director; Joseph Graham, dialogue director; Drew Eberson, assistant director. Cast: Hugh Herbert, Mary Maguire, Tom Brown, Joseph King, Teddy Hart, Arthur Aylesworth, Dorothy Vaughan, Tetsu Komai and James Burtis. Running time, 60 minutes.

WEAK, almost wholly transparent, commonplace, inconsequential and uninteresting in point of story, its efforts for compelling drama failing, yet I have no hesitation in recommending That Man's Here Again, a Warner-First National "quickie." The answer is Hugh Herbert, whose extraordinary ability performs a small miracle by concerting this most unworthy narrative into a quite diverting little screen attraction.

Were the production dramatically successful, I would center adverse criticism on the Herbert character. I would charge it with being out of place and I would call detrimental the fact that at nearly all of his appearances, story development is stopped to make way for comedy which has insufficient bearing on the plot. But because this series of interludes is practically the only redeeming feature the picture possesses, I have only praise for its inclusion.

Fundamentally the flimsy narrative is not what the title immediately suggests—a comedy. It is dramatic, and its drama is a great deal too unsubstantial and devoid of genuineness for even slight commendation. Entirely lacking is suspense.

I lay no blame to Louis King for the fact that the picture does not achieve its goal. He has tackled his tough assignment valiantly and merits praise for a sin-

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cere and satisfactory piece of direction. Surely the several well-directed pictures to King's credit make him worthy of better material than this.

Herbert is memorably funny in each of his scenes and has given no finer performance. A newcomer to American films, Mary Maguire, reveals a pleasant personality and a fair amount of talent, but does not seem to have the requisites for major stardom. Tom Brown easily wins secondary honors with his excellent portrayal, and Teddy Hart's few brief appearances are mildly amusing.

You will not regret seeing That Man's Here Again if you are a Hugh Herbert admirer. And who isn't?

Formula Crook-Drama

WE HAVE OUR MOMENTS, Universal. Directed by Alfred L. Werker; associate producer, Edmund Grainger; original story by Charles F. Belden and Frederick Stephani; screen play, Bruce Manning and Charles Grayson; photographer, Milton Krasner; art direction, Jack Otterson; associate, Loren Patrick; film editor, Frank Gross; sound, William R. Fox and Edward Wetzel; special effects, John P. Fulton; musical drector, Charles Previn. Cast: Sally Eilers, James Dunn, Mischa Auer, Thurston Hall, David Niven, Hymer, Marjorie Gateson, Grady Sutton, Joyce Compton.

HERE is a story basically so antiquated one almost expects to hear it creak. Meeting its characters is similar to meeting old friends, and when not many feet of celluloid have been unreeled we know what is going to take place during the remainder of the picture. We know the elderly man and woman of culture and supposed respectability, but actually thieves, will be forced to surrender to "the law," which, in the person of a young man in disguise, is aboard the Europe-bound ocean liner carrying the crooks and their loot. We know that the pretty small-town American school teacher, on her initial European holiday, will become innocently involved with the criminals and that she and the detective will fall in love and quarrel. We know, at being introduced to him, that the debonair young Englishman will turn out to be another crook and eventually will be arrested with his confreres. We know, too, when first seeing the "mug" confederate, that his presence is merely for the purpose of supplying comedy relief. And we are far from surprised when the youthful detective, his job finally done, follows his extended misunderstanding with the girl by taking her in his arms. It is all old stuff, but quite entertainingly presented.

We Have Our Moments has much to its credit. A smart, beautifully mounted production, it contains some good direction, highly commendable acting and adroitly written dialogue, much more dialogue, in fact, than is necessary-a condition that producers with disheartening consistency permit in their output and consequently notable screen material often is weakened. Parts of the picture would have carried more effectiveness, greater strength, had speeches been stripped to the essentials and, too, had some of them been spoken in quieter tones. We are given a large quantity of comedy, some of it very amusing, some of it too strained and clankingly interpolated to win my approval. On the whole We Have Our Moments is enjoyable enough to warrant commendation as an offering well worth seeing.

Alfred Werker's direction is generally praiseworthy. Sally Eilers and James Dunn once more are teamed, the two sharing major billing with Mischa Auer. Miss Eilers, charming throughout, gives what seems to me her best portrayal, and Dunn's work achieves complete success. David Niven does superbly, offering his most notable screen work. The comedy is carried mainly by Auer, Warren Hymer and Grady Sutton, and of the three, Hymer's is the superior performance. Most of the time Auer works too hard to be genuinely amusing. Thurston Hall and Marjorie Gateson are splendid. And an orchid to Milton Krasner, photographer.

CINEMATIC FABLE

By Mabel Keefer

ONCE upon a time there was a great industry called the Film Industry. One day two travelers—Sam and John B.—who were journeying in the same direction, entered into a discussion of this industry in which both were vitally interested.

Said John B.: "Your producers are to be congratulated on the marked progress they are making in the quality of their screen entertainment. They've jolly well outdone themselves!'

"Same to you, old man!" answered Sam. "In my estimation both your producers and mine are on the up-andup. But there still is a good bit of climbing to be done."

"Righto!" said John B. "For one thing we've got to acknowledge the tremendous importance of the psychological effect of the entertainment provided by the cinema."

"You bet we have!" Sam spoke with great earnestness. "Just the other day, my daughter, Columbia, said: 'Dad, I do wish we could have more pictures that would give us zest for living. I like stories that make me feel that it's fun to play the game.' "

"My Britannia feels the same way," replied John B. "She calls it 'showing good sportsmanship in one's manner of living.' And she particularly likes pictures with the grandeur of your American scenery for a background. That, with real romance, humor—"

S_{AM} interrupted. "Ah, there you have it! Humor! Do you realize that much of the greatness of our two nations is due to the fact that we cultivate the sanity-promoting art of laughing at ourselves?"

"Ver-r-v true! So-o-o we do!" responded John B.

Sam stared for a second, then he grinned. "Oh, yes, to be sure! Gilbert & Sullivan."

"So you know your Gilbert & Sullivan?" queried John

"And how!" replied Sam. His eyes twinkled. "That means that, indubitably, I know my Gilbert & Sullivan." "Oh- er- that is-" stumbled John B. Then, triumphantly-"Oh, yeah?"

Sam shook his head. "Not too good-don't let it get you!"

"Britannia is always hoping for originality in cinema

entertainment," said John B.
Sam chuckled. "Not long ago Columbia and some young man were discussing a picture they had just seen. They were particularly pleased with it because the story

was quite free from trite themes and hackneyed situations. She said: 'It really is most encouraging. Perhaps the time will come when some producer will absentmindedly let the cat out of the bag by making a picture showing there are any number of people in this country—clever, up-to-date people at that—who get more of a kick out of popping corn than they do out of popping corks.' 'Shush!' implored the young man, looking around in mock terror—'Tis rank treason thou dost speak! Hast forgot that walls have ears?... That the night hath a thousand eyes?... But—and thou wouldst prove thy rash statement—go, get corn and popper, and hie thee to you open fire that doth glow right valiantly.'

"As they sat before the fire I could hear them talking of different types of pictures they would like to see. And this should interest you! They spoke of screen stories written with your beautiful English countryside for a background; stories for instance dealing with the days of the troubadours, which, they insisted, would make fine

musical shorts if done by artists."

OHN B. exclaims, "Oh, I say, there's an idea!... Of course, as a whole the troubadours and minstrels were not an exemplary lot, but I daresay there was an occasional one who would do nicely as the hero of a musical love story." He paused, then went on thoughtfully—"The music would of necessity have to be something quite different.... And, as you say, done with a great deal of artistry.... Those superb artists of yours—ah—Miss MacDonald and Mr. Eddy—"

"Sorry, old man!" interrupted Sam, "grant you that they would be ideal for a musical picture dealing with medieval days—I'd like mighty well to see them in a picture like that myself. But as a matter of fact, Columbia and I hope that some day not too far distant, we'll see Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy in another picture with our own great out-of-doors for a background; and that whether they sing from a mountain top or in a cabin before an open fire, it will be as a part of the story, with an orchestral background done in such a manner that one feels the musical accompaniment, but does not consciously hear it."

"Fine idea, that!" said John B. "I must tell Britannia about it. She'll be hoping for it too.... But about that troubadour picture.... Comedy of course.... Hm.... I wonder.... Whom have we to compare with Miss MacDonald and Mr. Eddy?..."

"Possibly you have someone," replied Sam, "but I'm

from Missouri!"

"Your from—" began John B., looking puzzled, then—"Oh, yes, I know! You mean to tell me I shall have to show you."

"Righto!" said Sam.

And they journeyed on, deep in thought; their minds filled with the great potentialities of the cinema.

Your issue of February 27, which arrived after I had cancelled my subscription, was so good that I have changed my mind. I will get the money for it somehow—and perhaps piece-meal. We teachers in Portland were hard hit by the failure of our recent legislation, but we still need your comments if we are going to teach motion picture appreciation. So please send me the next issues after that mentioned above so that I shall not miss any numbers.——, Portland, Oregon.





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MAKE WAY FOR TOMORROW * KID GALAHAD * A STAR IS BORN BEETHOVEN CONCERTO * SHALL WE DANCE? * CAFE METROPOLE WOMAN CHASES MAN * TURN OFF THE MOON * THE GO-GETTER DANCE, CHARLIE, DANCE * ANGEL'S HOLIDAY THE THIRTEENTH CHAIR * HOLLYWOOD COWBOY

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From the

B

Editor's Easy Chair

WHEN you finish a good dinner this evening and light up your usual twenty-five-cent cigar, give thought to the fact that you are smoking what could have been breakfasts for eight children who need them. I learned that from Mrs. Joe Schildkraut. She is one of a group of Hollywood and Los Angeles women who are bent on doing something on behalf of the under-nourished youngsters who attend our public schools. Investigation conducted on a scientific basis to assure its accuracy, revealed there are two thousand children hereabouts who go to school every morning without breakfast, or with so little it really does not count. The reason is the poverty of their parents. That means under-nourishment, and under-nourishment is an invitation to tubercular germs and bugs which produce other varieties of disastrous human results. It also explains part of the tax bill you and I have to pay, for inadequately nourished children grow up into the patients treated in public institutions.

However, when Mrs. Bill Dieterle heard about it, she did not think of it in terms of dollars and cents. She and Bill have quite a collection of pet charities which so far they have been successful in keeping out of the chatter columns, but here Mrs. Bill found one a little too big for her and Bill to handle alone. That any youngster should go hungry to school and sit through the morning with his fast unbroken until noon brought the sustaining lunch provided by the women of the Parent-Teachers Association—that in this time of plenty and growing prosperity any boy or girl should go through life with the permanent handicap of early under-nourishment—well, something really had to be done about it, and Mrs. Bill saw to it that something was done.

Now we have the Children's Breakfast Club, one of the kindest things ever thought of. Mrs. Dieterle heads it; and of course that grand woman, Mrs. Abe Lehr, is in it. When any charitable wheel begins to turn in Hollywood, you may be sure Mrs. Abe's shoulder is helping it go. And there are Mrs. Jack Warner, Mrs. O. Ronald Button, Mrs. Salka Viertel, Mrs. Edgar Rice Burroughs, Mrs. Rufus von Kleinsmid, and several other fine women to keep it from being a purely motion picture enterprise. As Joe is in no way under nourished, Mrs. Joe Schildkraut is devoting most of her attention to the children who are. However, Joe is not complaining. It was he who put me wise to what is going on.

The club wanted facts to go on. It interested milk and breakfast food concerns and found out that with their cooperation they could serve each child a nourishing, warm breakfast for three cents. But first it must get the three cents. That is where you and I come into it. The whole three cents will go for food. Ronald Button provides the office and clerical expense, and Jack Warner provides all the printed matter. Ten dollars will provide breakfasts for one child for one year. During school terms the breakfast will be served at school; between terms it will be delivered each morning to the child's home.

HEN you sit down to your bountiful breakfast tomorrow morning, give a thought to the little guest you might have with you. Just place three pennies on the table, and—presto!—little Polly will be beside you, Polly of the circles under eyes which look at you gratefully, whose cheeks will be sunken because of lack of what you will be providing, pale cheeks because there is not sufficient health behind them to push color into sight. And every morning when you place your pennies and Polly takes her seat, you will see the eyes lose their relative bigness as the cheeks fill out, the limbs grow sturdy and the little body become plump. And all of it will be your doing.

You unfortunate people who have no children in your home, can have one as your guest each morning for only what it costs to lick a stamp. And you bachelors to whom the film industry has been generous in return for what you do for it, you fellows who are grouchy in the morning when you sit down to eat breakfast alone, just think what it would mean to have a little Polly beside you to help start the day aright—some weak little thing you can make strong for only three cents a day. And when Polly gets plump and rosy, you can chuck her out and take on Buddy and make a robust little devil out of him at a total outlay of three cents a day! If your imagination is sturdy enough to hold up its end, you can have a whale of a time merely by sending a check to the Children's Breakfast Club, Room 213, 6331 Hollywood Boulevard. By all means make a child your breakfast guest!

UP to date, the aspirant for the Academy award for the best performance of this year will have to beat Bob Montgomery's characterization in Night Must Fall.

WRITES Ed Schallert in Los Angeles Timess "The all-star cast is becoming more and more a necessity for the big picture in Hollywood. Is this because the fans are spoiled by those which have been offered already? Within a year, if that's so, it will become more and more difficult, not to say expensive, to assemble the required brilliant aggregations." Hollywood's present production policy ultimately must be brought back to a sane basis. Film programs are holding their audiences fairly well now only by the constant upward curve shown on the cost sheet. All-star casts, overpowering sets, great moving spectacles-all are entertainment elements which easily satiate audiences. To fill houses to the paying point, each such item must top the one which preceded it. That means that each must cost more than the one before it. The ingenuity of art directors and spectacle producers by no means is exhausted. They can go on topping their previous numbers if they are given sufficient money. But if they are to be relied upon to keep the industry prosperous, as they are being relied upon now, they never will manage it, for the natural evolution of the million-dollar picture of today is the five milliondollar picture of tomorrow. Money is like dope; the more of it given you, the more you want. Producers ultimately must get over the notion they can make screen entertainment out of money. It is a mistaken idea which even the strong film industry is not strong enough to bear without ultimate collapse. The one ingredient which has the greatest box-office value is one which, as raw material, costs nothing—human emotions. When producers develop sufficient brains to give them an understanding of the nature of the business they are in, they will eliminate bewildering sets and fill the gaps with people with human impulses; their pictures will cost a fraction of their present cost, the public will be pleased and exhibitors will make money.

PRODUCERS who burned with envy when Darryl Zanuck stole a march on them and signed Gypsy Lee, will point with pride to their higher regard for good taste when public indignation at the insult to decency prevents the showing of a picture with the strip-teaser in it.

THE Dominos Revel, presented two evenings recently in The Little Theatre In the Garden, provided some rare entertainment. There were twenty skits and blackouts on the program, all of them staged by Gene Lockhart and sixteen of them written by him. And for good measure Gene acted as master-of-ceremonies, weaving the various turns together with a string of witty remarks which made each of his appearances a big item on the program. I have known him hitherto only as an actor, but now I can with confidence recommend him to producers as an exceedingly clever writer of a brand of highclass comedy they could use to their advantage. The whole program revealed a wealth of talent which suggests it would be wise on the part of studios to call home their scouts who are scurrying hither and you in search of new faces and have the turns run over again for them. Robert Chisholm, handsome, stalwart, a perfect romantic type, possessor of a magnificent baritone voice, contributed one stirring number which combined rare dramatic acting ability with complete mastery of singing technique. He could be a sensation on the screen if he would go to London and let some scout from Hollywood discover him there. The foolish fellow came to Hollywood in the hope of getting into Hollywood-made pictures. Marek Windheim, a little chap, formerly with the Metropolitan, is an operatic singer with comedy talent the screen could use. Doris Lloyd, whose record of never giving a poor performance on the screen apparently means nothing to producers, does a bit of dramatic acting which held her audience spellbound. Kathleen Lockhart is another who stood out, both her acting and singing being loudly applauded. The whole program was one which should fill a large theatre for many nights, and suggests the thought that Hollywood should have a continuous variety house with Gene Lockhart as its controlling genius.

PRODUCERS seem to be giving increasing attention to the artistic possibilities of opening titles, a wide variety of new and striking treatments having been in evidence lately. Universal has taken a lead, blending movement and composition to attain pictorial results of high quality. A little attention might now be paid by producers to the other end of their pictures. When close-ups first came into use, some bright individual thought it would be a good idea to wind up a screen offering with a screenful of two heads with clinging lips. Not since then has Hollywood developed anyone with sufficient brains to think up anything which would banish the kiss close-up forever from the screen. There should be no conventions in any art. The last impression a picture viewer takes away with him is the last thing he saw on the screen, and Hollywood is stupid enough to make this last impression the same one as he carried away the night before and the night before that. If I were a producer, I would be ashamed to allow a production of mine to go out with the same tag every other producer uses.

NEW YORK authorities have put strip-teasers out of business because "such acts are too filthy for New York audiences." The exponents of this high art of being indecent need not worry. There are always Hollywood studios. Darryl Zanuck, who signed the first one in the person of Gypsy Lee, now has an opportunity to secure another score who are out of jobs, and give us a striptease ballet. Those taking part in it need not be trained. The only qualification is advance publicity, no matter how dirty.

A CANNY young man named Leon Lord presides over the destinies of Hollywood's future stars. On Cole Avenue is the Spotlight Theatre. If you hurry you may catch the final performance of House of Madness. June Wilkins, the clever progeny of Paul Wilkins, casting director for Republic, is starred. She, along with most of the other youngsters has something producers want.

One mail recently brought thirty-one subscriptions to the Spectator from the Motion Picture Appreciation class of a junior college.

Some Late Previews

Metro's They Gave Him a Gun, a picture which will fail to give audiences much satisfaction, as it is made from an illogical, psychologically unsound story and is inappropriately cast, was previewed one day too late to enable a review of it to appear in this Spectator. It will be among the reviews in the next issue.

Truly Great Accomplishment

MAKE WAY FOR TOMORROW, Paramount. Producer-Director, Leo McCarey; novel, Josephine Lawrence; play, Helen and Nolan Leary; screen play, Vina Delmar; photographer, William C. Mellor; special effects, Gordon Jennings; music, George Antheil; musical director, Boris Morros; film editor, LeRoy Stone; assistant director, Harry Scott. Cast: Victor Moore, Beulah Bondi, Fay Bainter, Thomas Mitchell, Porter Hall, Barbara Read, Maurice Moscovitch, Elizabeth Risdon, Minna Gombell, Ray Mayer, Ralph Remley, Louise Beavers, Louis Jean Heydt, Gene Morgan. Running time, 90 minutes.

BEAUTIFUL picture, one of those rare ones which A memory puts on its list of those impossible to forget. See it now, and ten, twenty years hence you will be telling the children about it, or will be living it over again with those who see it with you. That is the kind of picture Make Way for Tomorrow is, fit to take its place among the best of all the silents and in its way the best of all the talkies. It is a little picture, its story about wholly unimportant people who merely live in front of us some incidents in their uneventful, commonplace lives; a picture which has no dramatic moments, no brilliant dialogue passages, no great stars, only one visually impressive sequence; but during its placid progress from fade-in to fade-out, it plays softly a symphony on your emotions, goes into your heart and leaves you, when you leave it, with a lump in your throat and tears in your eyes. Make Way for Tomorrow is an emotional assault which will become a part of screen history.

Leo McCarey is more than just the producer and director of the picture. He is its creator; it is his emotional response to the story's appeal which has been photographed, the beats of his sympathetic heart which set its tempo. In the past identified principally with fast moving comedies, he was responsible for laughter and gay moments in film theatres and gave no hint of the heights he could reach with strongly human story material. So deeply was he impressed with the possibilities of Josephine Lawrence's novel that he lived with it a full year without salary, steadily building a picture of it in his mind. He had Vina Delmar put it into a script as he saw it, selected the people for the various parts, imbued them with his own enthusiasm, and during shooting lived with them in a little world his and their emotions had created and which only the camera invaded to bring to our outer world what it saw inside.

Q,UTSTANDING among the many fine things the screen reveals as the film unwinds, is its lack of direct bid for our emotional response. It is a romantic tragedy, its romance culminating in marriage fifty years before the

story opens, its principals, as we see them, two dear old people who have five sons and daughters, all comfortably situated, but too occupied with their own affairs to provide a joint home for their parents when the old home in which the children were raised was taken over by the bank. The last scene shows the old father taking a train for California to live with a daughter, the old wife bound for a home for aged women as soon as the train departs. For half a century they had lived together; for the short rest of their lives a heartless, unheeding continent would separate them. That is all the story there is.

But at no spot in its telling is there a maudlin moment, no obvious effort to gain our sympathy, no invitation to the tears which come unbidden to eyes in the audience. Even the two victims of the tragedy of unfilial thoughtlessness enter no complaints, weep no tears, ask for no sympathy. They feel deeply, it is true; and we feel with them. If the children could see through the masks the parents wear, as the camera sees through them, the story would not have reached its closing scene, one in which the dry-eyed old people exchange a gentle farewell kiss while each tries to deceive the other with the simulated sincerity of their assurances that soon they will be together again—one of the most poignant moments in the annals of screen entertainment.

HE picture is a psychologically sound example of screen craftsmanship. The measure of the emotional response a film creation earns marks the degree in which it has achieved its purpose as entertainment. It is not its mission to photograph emotion for us to ape; its mission is to make suggestions which our imagination weaves into facts which appeal to our sympathy and induce our emotional reaction. This picture, therefore, with its lack of direct appeal to our sympathy, is constructed along authentic cinematic lines. It has that precious quality of apparently being indifferent to the existence of an audience.

McCarey's direction throughout is particularly notable for its freedom from audience influence, for its lack of resort to timeworn devices to emphasize a story point, to cause a laugh or coax a tear. He takes us into the homes of members of one family and permits us to acquaint ourselves with what is happening in them. He puts no value on the happenings, does not present them as being anything out of the ordinary, merely allows us to witness them and make of them what we will.

The emotional appeal of the picture is cumulative. Let us take one incident, a trivial thing in itself but made powerfully appealing by the careful building of all which goes before. The old people, on their last evening together and while awaiting the time of the train's departure, visit the now fashionable hotel at which they spent their honeymoon half a century before. In the restaurant the orchestra is playing a waltz, and they decide to dance. As they reach the floor, the music turns into fast modern tempo which completely bewilders the romantic couple. The orchestra leader notices them among the many dancers, stops the fast music and starts the dreamy old waltz, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." The old man smiles his thanks, the leader smiles, and the dance goes on.

HERE is not much to the scene I describe. The orchestra leader never saw the old people before, nor they him. He is a young fellow with kind instincts; the old man and his wife are nice people; it is just an act of ordinary courtesy to play a dance for them. But if you can sit in your seat in a film theatre and view that scene dry-eyed; if a lump does not crowd your throat the instant you hear the first bar of the old sweetheart song and realize that here is a strange young man giving the charming old people what their own children deny them—well, if the scene does not affect you that way, you must be some sort of cold fish who should stay away from pictures.

A piece of discerning casting was Victor Moore's selection for the part of the old husband; rather brave, too, for most of his screen appearances have been as a twittery, amusing half-wit whose sole duty was to provoke laughter. In the McCarey picture he gives us a characterization of extraordinary merit, a deeply human portrayal which gives him rank as one of the screen's greatest actors. And as much praise can be given Beulah Bondi, who plays the wife. A tremendously pathetic figure she is, but she is made so by the conditions which surround her. No word of complaint does she utter in the entire picture. Maurice Moscovitch impresses again as a really great artist; Fay Bainter, of course, gives a splendid performance, and others who contribute greatly to the artistic perfection of the production are Thomas Mitchell, Barbara Read, Elizabeth Risdon, Minna Gombell, Ray Mayer, Louise Beavers.

As evidence of the thoroughness of McCarey's preparation for the production, his meticulous attention to detail in building it to assure perfection in all its details, is the presence in the cast of as excellent an actor as Porter Hall to speak but one line. Paul Stanton, another established actor with many sympathetic performances to his credit, also plays a small part. And rounding off the parade of practically perfect performances is that of Louis Jean Heydt, who, in the few moments we see him, presents us with an acting gem. No picture ever has offered a more perfectly directed group of players.

And no other picture has demonstrated more vividly the potentialities of the screen as a social force. In essence it is a sermon, its text presented on the screen at the outset: "Honor thy father and mother;" but it is none the less gripping as a piece of screen entertainment which as such will earn close attention and wide acclaim. No other medium of expression could match the strength with which it drives home its lesson, yet throughout its course are sprinkled many chuckles and amusing incidents. It is as if itself were unaware it had any social significance, as if its only concern had been from the start to acquaint us, for no particular reason, with what was happening within the family circle of the wholly unimportant Mr. and Mrs. Barkley Cooper. And as we watch what is happening and listen to the sentiments which motivate it, we learn a great deal it is good for those who have parents, or are parents, to know.

It Is Poor Screen Writing

A STAR IS BORN, United Artists release of Selznick-International production. Produced by David O. Selznick. Starring Janet Gaynor and Fredric March. Directed by William A. Wellman; original story by William A. Wellman and Robert Carson; screen play by Dorothy Parker, Alan Campbell and Robert Carson; designed in color by Lansing C. Holden; music by Max Steiner; photography by W. Howard Green; art direction by Lyle Wheeler; Edward Boyle, associate; costumes by Omar Kiam; special effects by Jack Cosgrove; Hal C. Kern, supervising film editor; James E. Newcom, film editor; Ray Flynn, production manager; recorded by Oscar Lagerstrom; Eric Stacey, assistant director; Natalie Kalmus, color supervisor for Technicolor. Supporting cast: Adolphe Menjou, May Robson, Andy Devine, Lionel Stander, Peggy Wood, Elizabeth Jenns, Edgar Kennedy, J. C. Nugent, Guinn Williams, Clarence Wilson and Vince Barnett. Running time, III minutes.

DAVE SELZNICK did his end of it splendidly, giving A Star Is Born a notable production, which, even with the cheapening effect of color photography, still makes the picture an almost continuous series of pictorially attractive scenes. The technicolor experts also did their end of it well, demonstrating definite progress in subduing the color until it gives little offense to the eye and holds out promise of attaining perfection by further development to the point of the total disappearance of color from the screen. And writers of the screen play are to be commended for their valuable contribution to the screen as a whole. They have left the screen story of Hollywood still to be written, and a great story it can be if written by someone with knowledge of the soul of Hollywood and skill in expressing it in cinematic terms.

Physically an artistic and obviously expensive production which reflects Selznicks's desire to give the public full return for its money, in its other aspects it is cheap in both theme and sentiment. It probably will earn a profit by virtue of its presentation of Hollywood scenes which will interest the world at large, the newsreel quality of the production being its chief asset. Spiritually it is a lame presentation of Hollywood, not even approaching realization of its possibilities as screen material. It tells a story of an unknown country girl's rise to film stardom without developing fully the tragedy of heartaches with which the path to stardom is strewn. Thus it becomes, not a story of Hollywood, as I presume it was intended to be, but one of an extraordinarily lucky girl whose experience never has been duplicated and probably never will.

THE genuine Hollywood story will be one motivated by experiences peculiar to the film capital and which could be found nowhere else. The Star Is Born is motivated by drunkenness which wrecks the career of a male star just it would wreck the career of a steel worker in a Pennsylvania mill or a physician in Alabama. Made in Hollywood, undoubtedly it will be accepted as a true representation of Hollywood conditions, an authentic document which suggests that alcohol figures largely as a factor in screen affairs. The story weakness of this treatment lies in the narrowness of its application; it affects no one but the person who drinks, making it logical for the public to presume that keeping sober is all one has to do to prolong his career as a star.

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And there are so many other things, possible only in Hollywood, tragic things which could have been made the motivating factor of the story. Instead of an indictment of the screen personnel, the picture so easily could have been a defense of the film colony as a whole. Freddie March's performance as the star who becomes a drunkard, pleased me more than any he has given, but the manner of his fall from the height of greatness will not earn him sympathy. It is entirely his own fault, and his fall is the logical outcome of his individual folly. His characterization could have been made tremendously impressive and wholly sympathetic if the responsibility for his loss of popularity has been ascribed to the fickleness of the public or to any one of a dozen other influences over which he had no control and which reflected no discredit on him personally. Thus, instead of our viewing him with disgust, we would have wept in sympathy with him for having been made the victim of something which may have happened to anyone in pictures.

HE drama of the country girl's sudden rise to fame is not developed. We do not see her in the moment of her triumph. When our interest lies with her, when we wish to be with her to be witnesses of her realization that all her dreams have come true, we are placed outside the theatre to listen to the departing audience recording in conversation the fact of her success. That is how we are made aware a new star has been born. What could have been presented to us dramatically is related to us in chance remarks by people unknown to us and whom we happen to overhear. We were subjected to the same thing when the girl made her first test. We see the test start, and the next thing we see is a contract with the girl's name signed to it. There was a rare chance for an emotional treat in the test scene—the bored attitude of the people on the set; to them, just another test; the awakened interest as the test proceeds; to us, surprise that the girl should be so good; on the set, amazement, acclaim—any amateur screen writer could have made of it a great screen moment.

But the greatest story weakness, an incomprehensible exhibition of sheer ignorance of the most elemental principles of the screen, is the manner of the presentation of the story as a whole. The first thing we see is a page of the script, with shooting directions for the opening scene of a picture. It fades into the action it describes. At the end of the picture the last thing we see is the script for the final scene, describing the action as we have seen it. Unless a picture can convince us we are looking at reality, we can derive no entertainment from it. The illusion of reality, therefore, is the first thing a motion picture must create; we must feel we are looking at real people moving in a three-dimensional world, that the things happening them are real, not makebelieve; that what we are viewing is life, not a motion picture.

The producer spends almost a million dollars in making a piece of screen entertainment and starts it off with documentary evidence of its status as something he does not expect us to take seriously; and to keep us from carrying away an impression if its authenticity in case we forget the opening display of the script page, he puts the last one on the screen to remind us that what we looked at was phoney. In a dozen years of reviewing pictures I cannot recall having seen a comparable exhibition of downright screen stupidity, of such astounding ignorance of the spirit of film entertainment.

ANET GAYNOR gives a performance of more strength than I looked for. The few previous pictures in which she essayed something more demanding than ingenuous girl type, revealed nothing to entitle her to serious consideration as an actrees, but in A Star Is Born, a new star, indeed, has been born. She proves herself entirely proficient in a role of many emotional facets. Adolphe Menjou gives such an excellent, intelligent performance that he probably will get but little credit for it. Apparently he merely walks through the picture, does no acting, is merely the big producer, all of which forms an impression only the most skillful acting can create. Andy Devine is another who is a little better than usual. He is a clever fellow.

Lionel Stander, another capable actor, carries the burden of a characterization which adds one to the other weaknesses of the production. In the last of his important scenes he is made to reveal a viciousness wholly unbelievable and out of character. It is a clumsy device to explain March's action in starting to drink again. Of far more story value would it have been if March had resumed drinking without more prompting than that of his lust for liquor. The maudlin attempt to justify his debauch by having Stander make an unprovoked and illogical attack on him, is in keeping with the other revelations of poor writing by the authors of the screen play.

Stirring Prize-Ring Picture

KID GALAHAD, Warners. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Sam Bischoff; director, Michael Curtiz; original novel, Francis Wallace; screen play, Seton I. Miller; photographer, Tony Gaudio; music, lyric, M. K. Jerome and Jack Scholl; dialogue director, Irving Rapper. Cast: Edward G. Robinson, Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Wayne Morris, Jane Bryan, Harry Carey, Willian Haade, Soledad Jiminez, Joe Cunningham, Ben Welden, Joseph Crehan, Veda Ann Borg, Frank Faylen, Harland Tucker.

QUITE the best prize-ring picture the screen has given us. All about fighters and their managers, Kid Galahad still has a spiritual quality which gives it definite and sustained emotional appeal. The production gets its greatest strength from the personalities of two young people, Wayne Morris, who plays the name part, and Jane Bryan, who plays his sweetheart. The desire to see the young fellow become world's champion and the romance of the two end at the alter, is what keeps our interest alive. We root for both of them because we like them and wish them to have anything their hearts desire.

One of the constant chirpings of the SPECTATOR has been that the screen is not an acting art, that all it asks of a player is that his absorption in his part be so complete that he reacts subconsciously to its demands—that he is the person he plays, not an actor pretending he is such person. Motion picture producers hold a contrary

view—that their actors must be trained in stage acting, not in screen acting. Clad in the impenetrable armor of their confidence in their judgement, it is impossible for them to comprehend that these two young people in Kid Galahad proved the soundness of the SPECTATOR'S contentions regarding screen acting. They do not act, both of them lacking the age and experience essential to their mastery of anything they set out to learn. Under Mike Curtiz's wise guidance they present themselves, doing what they would do in real life if the same situations and conditions confronted them. Thus they give perfect screen performances. They are new to us, thus making it easier for our imaginations to accept them as the people they play. We do not judge them by standards they previously had established. Properly handled, each will become an outstanding screen favorite.

WITH them in the cast we have Bette Davis and Edward Robinson whom we have seen so frequently we cannot escape judging their performances by the standards they have set for themselves. That constitutes the handicap they face when they strive to make us believe they are the persons they play. They have a much longer road to travel. Each of them plays excellently, neither ever was more impressive. Several times Robinson has been given much the same part to play, and once more a bullet puts an end to his appearances. I do not see that his death was the logical demand of the story, but it is not an important objection.

Bette plays what really is a secondary role, but her complete mastery of it and the sheer force of her personality, make it stand out as a beautifully etched characterization. She plays it with quiet self-effacement, with no histrionic flights to remind us that she is an oustanding dramatic actress. As it appears to me, Bette revealed that she is a regular trouper when she consented to assume the part. Humphrey Bogart plays a character of the sort he should be permitted to get away from, that of a dead-pan gangster of whom the public at large must be getting as tired as I am. I cannot understand how producers can fail to realize that Bogart is the ideal type for sympathetic roles. Our old friend, Harry Carey, is excellent in the role of a trainer of fighters, and Soledad Jiminez gives us another of her little acting cameos. Joe Cunningham makes one of the most convincing newspaper men I have seen in any picture. Various other small parts and bits were handled with a skill which reflects credit on both players and director. M. K. Jerome and Jack Scholl, composer and lyricist, contributed a tuneful song which was sung effectively by Bette Davis.

IKE CURTIZ performed a miracle in giving such inherently messy story material such strong and evenly maintained sentimental appeal. The esthetics of the prize ring and prize-fight racketeers have not been developed quite up to the standards set by the higher and less robust arts, but Mike serves them to us in a manner which holds our unwavering attention during the entire running of the film. We have had no finer examble of quiet, human scenes

being presented with such understanding and compelling force as to prompt a large audience to reward them with the hearty applause usually accorded only big, dramatic moments in previewed pictures. The vigor of the prize fight scenes—the whole thing is sprinkled with them—makes them as thrilling as real fights can be. It is something to the credit of a director who in one picture can handle a tender, boy and girl love scene and a hectic battle between two pugilists, with equal authority.

Sam Bischoff, associate producer, adds another to his long list of worthy screen productions. He has succeeded in giving us a prize fight picture which surely will be liked by those who do not like prize fights. Seton I. Miller's screen play, Curtiz's direction, and Sam's production knowledge combined to give us a series of fistic combats which are not merely exhibitions of physical skill. They are fought before a background of emotional significance, to the accompaniment of our sentimental interest in the effect they will have on two young people for whom we have developed deep affection. And that is why you should see Kid Galahad even if you regard prize fighting as too vulgar for words.

Assault on Question Mark

SHALL WE DANCE? RKO. Producer, Pandro S. Berman; director, Mark Sandrich; story, Lee Loeb and Harold Buchman; adaptation, P. J. Wolfson; screen play, Allan Scott and Ernest Pagano; music, George Gershwin; lyrics, Ira Gershwin; photographer, David Abel; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; dance director, Hermes Pan; ballet director, Harry Losee; musical director, Nathaniel Shilkret; film editor, William Hamilton; assistant director, Argyle Nelson. Cast: Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Edward Everett Horton, Eric Blore, Jerome Cowan, Kettii Gallian, William Brisbane, Harriet Hoctor, Ann Shoemaker.

WHEN RKO eliminates at least twenty minutes of the story of Shall We Dance? and puts a question mark after the main title, it will have another Astaire-Rogers picture which should duplicate the success each of the preceding ones has scored at the box-office. Taking out some of the story will be a simple matter of weilding shears to snip off the film some of the nonessential story fragments which made the picture as previewed drag to the yawn-producing point. But putting a question mark after the main title—well, that is quite another matter.

RKO executives already have considered gravely the question of the question mark and have handed down a decision of tremendous import, one which shatters what hitherto had been regarded as a fixed principle of punctuation. Without warning they shake the faith of all educated people in the things they learned at school and college, and assume a dictatorship over language-usage which will bring a blush to the leaves of all the books on the world's library shelves. The executives, after due deliberation, handed down the decision that the interrogation point is unconstitutional. And now at a time when we are harassed by strikes at home and war scares abroad—when we would prefer to devote all our thought to Wally Simpson's wedding and Bob Feller's pitching arm—we have the abolition of the question mark to worry obout.

ARE we free men or are we slaves? Beg pardon! Are we free men or are we slaves. Are we going to stand for it.

Shall we dance to the tune those RKO executives play. I, for one, am all for the organization of a Restitution Party whose aim will be the reversal of the decision by packing the RKO executive force with six primary-school children and asking for a rehearing. The children, God bless them, will uphold the question mark's right to recognition. They will put Pan Berman, chief injustice of the RKO court, just where he belongs. The big sissy—picking on the cute little question mark! He need not think he has me scared. Bah! ???? That for him!

For a picture which reveals such gross ignorance before it starts, Shall We Dance? turns out to be capital entertainment, thanks chiefly to Fred Astaire's contribution to it. He has more to do, and Ginger Rogers has less, than in any of their previous joint productions. Most of his dances are solos and each of them reveals his complete mastery of his art. His enjoyment in his task, the intelligence reflected in his approach, the exquite grace of his effortless movements, combine to make each of his appearances a terpsichorean treat which will create enthusiasm in even the most blasé audience. And Fred is coming along rapidly both as an actor and as a singer, playing his part with more assurance and attacking his songs with more vigor. But his chief asset is the charm of his personality which illuminates everything he does. Those who see him only on the screen know as well as those who are acquainted with him in person, that Fred Astaire is a nice fellow, a rather shy, clean living, decent young man. That impression, more than his dancing, singing and his acting, is responsible for his box-office strength. We like the things he does chiefly because he, our friend, is doing them. That he does them so well is an added pleasure.

GINGER ROGERS is another who is coming along as an actress, seemingly being more at ease in this picture than in any previous one. She still has some distance to go with her dancing before hers ceases to suffer in comparison with Fred's. Her chief difficulty is the use of her hands. In the ballet sequence, Harriet Hoctor's hands are fascinating to watch. When Ginger dances, her hands, particularly her right one, are just expressionless things at the far ends of her arms. But, I said in a review of their previous picture, I admire greatly Ginger's grit in sticking to her determination to make her skill match that of her partner's. Edward Everett Horton gives us another of his completely satisfying performances, and Jerome Cowan, Ketti Gallian and William Brisbane make favorable impressions. Eric Blore, always the brilliant comedian, rounds off his performance with a telephone scene which is one of the funniest things presented on the screen. It is a superb bit of comedy work. Harriet Hoctor's extraordinary graceful dancing was rewarded at the preview with a hearty burst of applause. The screen could stand a lot more of what she can contribute to it.

Mark Sandrich directed with the competence we have learned to expect from him. In story, production and music he had a wealth of material to blend into a smoothly running whole, and he has made a fine job of it. The music of the Gershwins did not appeal to me as having outstanding quality, but I do not set myself up as an

authority on the subject. I will go just as far as to say that if I hear anyone whistle anything from Shall We Dance? I will be surprised. The story idea is amusing, but it is told in too many words and scenes. The production is magnificent, Van Nest Polglass and Carroll Clark having provided settings which prove strikingly effective. Their values are brought out admirably by the excellent quality of David Abel's photography. There is one particularly beautiful shot of a ship moving along New York's waterfront on a misty night. Nathaniel Shilkrets's direction of the music makes the most of what values it contains.

Russia Sends Us a Lesson

BEETHOVEN CONCERTO. Produced by Belgoskino, Leningrad, U.S.S.R.; directed by V. Schmidthof and M. Gavronsky; scenario, B. R. Pkhor. Cast: Vladimir Gardin, A. Larikov, A. Melnikov, M. Taimanov, V. Vasiliev, K. Eliasberg.

THE fellows who make pictures over in Russia have a quaint way of going at things. It is evident they are not profiting from what Hollywood could teach them. For instance, take Beethoven Concerto, a recent importation of the Grand International Theatre, which opens there May, 7. It has no romance, no stars, no villain, no acting, no comedy relief, no sex appeal, no thrills, no imposing sets, no strip-tease artists, no story complications. Anyone in Hollywood could have told the poor blundering Russians they would get nowhere with a production which lacked all these elements. At least half of themor, anyway, a stripteaser and one other—must be on hand from the beginning if the picture is to have a ghost of a show of getting anywhere. But lacking Hollywood's grasp of screen essentials, and, in any event, the only Gypsy Lee having been cornered by Darryl Zanuck to make audiences wonder what she would look like with no clothes on-a nice little touch which would add enormously to the atmosphere of good taste of the pictures she appears in—there was nothing for the Russians to do but carry on with their minus materials and make the best of it.

And what they made is one of the finest bits of screen entertainment it has been my good fortune to view, one which cries to Hollywood to take heed and do likewise. Just before seeing it I had written a paragraph about Hollywood's habit of making motion pictures out of money instead of human emotions. (See Easy Chair) Beethoven completely supports my contention. It lacks all the physical elements I enumerated, but is filled to the brim with emotional values. It is the theoretically perfect picture for American audiences, as our unfamiliarity with the players in it makes it easy for us to accept them as the people they play. Without effort it establishes the essential illusion of reality.

HE theme of the story is one of high esthetic value. It is about music and children, but by no means is a picture for children only. It is clean and decent, spirited, at times amusing, at all times emotionally appealing. Two boys are preparing for a national contest to select students for the conservatory of music. Strong, loyal

friendship exists between them. One is the son of professor of music, the other the son of a railroad engineer. A prank annoys the generally genial professor and he refuses to give further lessons to the engineers son. We have here a demonstration of the relativity of dramatic values. To the boy the cessation of instruction at such a crucial time is a real tragedy. So beautifully has the story been told, so completely has its mood been established and our sympathy established for the central figures, that we share with the boy the full force of the tragedy.

The story is told quietly, naturally, and never suggests either the actor or the director. Dialogue is read in easy, conversational tones, the superb music featured in the production is played softly enough to be easy on our ears without losing any of the musical values composers put in it. So completely are we carried along by the story, the brilliant success of the two boys at the national trials will produce one of the rare emotional thrills the screen gives us too infrequently. It shows what can be done in the way of making decency entertaining.

CASTING was done expertly. The professor is what we would expect him to be, a stoutish, good natured, softly spoken fellow, merely suggesting the artistic type. Hollywood probably would have cast Gregory Ratoff in the part to develop comedy by screaming at his pupils. The engineer is just an engineer; and the two boys differ in appearance and temperment precisely as we would expect the sons of two such different fathers to differ. A girl is prominent in the cast, just a girl. As I recall her, I believe she wears the same dress all the way through. I know she is without lipstick or make-up of any kind. What Hollywood would have done with her is a disturbing thought. There is an airedale dog who contributes a great deal to the air of authenticity the picture creates. All the many people on the screen are at complete ease in every scene. The children are permitted to be children, not encouraged into being actors. There is no glamor of any sort; it is as if the picture was too intent on being human to take on any airs which would have suggested the artificial.

I cannot refrain from once more claiming that here is a picture which supports the SPECTATOR'S theories as to what constitutes the proper talkie form. Whole sequences have no spoken word, yet the photography attracts no attention to itself. It is pure homespun, like all the other elements. A technical feat of outstanding quality is the synchronization of train noises with music as an accompaniment to an important sequence which takes place during a railroad journey. It is handled much more artistically than was the same treatment in *Monte Carlo* made by Ernest Lubitsch a few years ago.

The dialogue is in Russian, but the picture has English titles much more illuminating than most of those we have had in other similarly treated foreign-made pictures. Question marks are appended to all translated questions, which will cause RKO studio executives dreadful annoyance. However, they should take into consideration the

fact that the picture was edited before the executives handed down their decision declaring the question mark unconstitutional and banishing it from the screen.

Rather Illogical Story

CAFE METROPOLE, Twentieth Century-Fox. Directed by Edward H. Griffith; associate producer, Nunnally Johnson; screen play by Jacques Deval; original story by Gregory Ratoff; photogaraphy, Lucien Androit, A.S.C.; art direction, Duncan Cramer and Hans Peters; set decorations by Thomas Little; assistant director, William Forsyth; film editor, Irene Morra; costumes, Royer; sound, Joseph Aiken and Roger Heman; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Cast: Loretta Young, Tyrone Power, Adolphe Menjou, Gregory Ratoff, Charles Winninger, Helen Westley, Christian Rub, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Georges Renavent, Leonid Kinskey, Hal K. Dawson, Paul Porcasi, Andre Cheron, Andre Beranger.

WHEN we first see the hero (Tyrone Power), he is Menjou) adroitly eases him out of the place and receives a thousand-franc tip from the young American drunkard. The next sequence reveals Menjou as an embezzler, jointly with Christian Rub, of the cafe's money, Rub being a bookkeeper. Then we go to a gambling club where Adolphe has the bank at baccarat. Tyrone loses nearly half a million francs in one deal. A little more sober now, he writes a check to cover his losses; crumples the check and confesses he has no money in any bank. Club officials are about to handle the young man roughly, but Adolphe rescues him, picks the check from the floor, and later Adolphe, on threats of imprisonment on the charge of what the headwaiter calls "forging" a check, forces Tyrone to agree to make love to the daughter (Loretta Young) of an American millionaire (Charles Winninger), the idea being to get enough money from Winninger, in the way of a marriage settlement, to enable Adolphe to restore what he had stolen from the cafe.

A screen romance has entertainment value only to the extent of our regard for the parties to it, and our desire to see it end happily is dependent upon the degree of our respect for them. We can become interested in a purely intellectual way in the working out of the romance of two people we do not respect, but a screen creation containing that sort of romance lacks the emotional appeal which spells box-office success. We watch it much as we would a game of chess between two players who had no interest to us as individuals. Here we are asked to become interested in a hero who is a drunkard and a cheat, a girl the daughter of a millionaire who is ass enough to radio a head waiter to have wild strawberries for himself and celebrities for his daughter awaiting him when he reaches the cafe; and the head waiter, really the leading character in the story, is an embezzler.

THE ingrediants I list could have been mixed to produce a hilarious farce too amusing and ridiculous to challenge our critical sense. But Cafe Metropole is "played straight." We are asked to believe it and respond emotionally to it. It is motivated solely by the threat of imprisonment of a young man who committed no crime, Power himself protests that French law does not recognize a gambling debt; Menjou agrees, but charges Power with

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having "forged" a check, notwithstanding that he signed his own name to it. The law's non-recognition of the debt makes the check just a piece of paper for which its drawer received no consideration, which in turn makes the fact of its being drawn on a non-existing bank account no concern of the law. I can write a check for any amount and on a bank in which I have no money, give it to you as a present, and I have committed no crime. But if I accept anything from you of material value if I give you the check in payment of a legal debt—I can be prosecuted. In addition to all this, Power thinks he has destroyed the check and informs a half dozen witnesses it is no good, thus putting him beyond prosecution for criminal intent even if the check had been written for value received. It is the use to which a check is put, not the act of writing it, which brings it within reach of the

So with this unsoundly constructed story and a cast of unsympathetic character, Ned Griffith set himself to the task of telling us an entertaining story. He is one of the most capable directers serving motion pictures, but the fundamental weaknesses of the story he had this time made his job a tough one. The presence in his cast of Gregory Ratoff made it impossible to keep the dialogue below a headache-producing volume of noise, even though in two or three scenes Ratoff spoke in a conversational tone, a blessed relief from his customary roar. Possibly working under influences he could not control, Griffith permitted Loretta Young and Winninger to scream at one another in a long scene which is the nerve-wracking peak of the production.

THERE is a psychological fact pertaining to loud screen dialouge which directors do not take into account. It is that every person in a film theatre is theoretically as close to a character on the screen as the camera was when the scene was shot. In this Loretta-Winninger scene, we are taken into the bedroom in which the two are quarrelling; in close-ups of the two we are standing within inches of them. The microphone and the camera are alike in bringing things close to us. In a living theatre the volume of dialogue sound is mellowed by the distance it has to travel from the players on the stage to the people in the audience; it is louder to those in the orchestra seats than to those in the gallery.

In a film theatre the volume of sound is alike to all members of the audience, irrespective of the location of seats, the microphone having some strange power to project a whisper as far as it can a shout. This bedroom scene annoys us in two ways: physically by virtue of the impact of the loud noise on our nervous system, and psychologically by the lack of necessity for so much noise. In real life we have no patience with a man who addresses us more loudly than his distance from us makes necessary to our understanding of what he is saying. We regard screen dialogue in precisely the same way. Taking us into the bedroom of two people quarrelling in real life does not make it impossible for us to flee when the uproar becomes too much to bear. In a film theatre we have to sit and suffer.

And there is another point about this particular scene which suggests comment applicable to others like it. If Loretta and Winninger had been given lines cleverly sarcastic and also witty, lines which would have their values enchanced by quiet and bitter reading, the scene would have been stronger dramatically, more entertaining, and without offense to our aural nerves. Shouting has no place in screen entertainment, never has had, and never will have when scenarists learn to write sarcasm instead of uproar for quarrel scenes.

Possibly by this time you are wondering if Cafe Metropole is worth seeing. It is, if you are prepared to overlook the faults I have enumerated. Pictorially it is most attractive, Nunnally Johnson having seen to it that its settings matched the best of those being shown during this year of so many elaborate and artistic productions. Duncan Cramer, Hans Peters, and Thomas Little, responsible jointly for the visual quality of the picture, deserve the highest praise. Royer's gowns worn by the women appealed even to my masculine, untutored eye. Lucien Androit's camera work attains rare quality, one scene in a flower shop being photographed so expertly that each blossom gives you the impression you could pluck it from the screen. Another shot interested me. Loretta stands in the foreground, her figure sharp against the indistinct background. She sees something in the background; it clears; without losing her, we see what she sees in the background, which becomes indistinct again as she turns her back to it. That is an example of good photographic art and pure cinematic art, as it is through Loretta's eyes we see what she sees.

All the performances in the picture will please you, if, again, you can overlook the story weaknesses. Young Power is coming along amazingly. In every phase of his unfortunate characterization he reflects the perfect actor, completely at home in every situation. Loretta Young, whose screen appearances always please me, is her usual sweet and capable self Adolphe Menjou should not appear in so many pictures. I have only so many superlatives at my command and I feel I should not use them twice in the same Spectator. To what I say about him in my Star Is Born review, written before this one, I say ditto. Winninger was wise casting for the part he plays, and Helen Westley's grande dame is an acting gem. Christian Rub, an actor I admire greatly and yet hope to see in a part worthy of his talents, makes his short characterization stand out prominently.

And for his musical direction of the production Louis Silvers is to be commended. The music will be responsible for a generous share of whatever satisfaction *Cafe Metropole* will give audiences.

Crazy Sort of Thing

WOMAN CHASES MAN, Samuel Goldwyn production for United Artists release. Features Miriam Hopkins and Joal McCrea, Charles Winninger, Erik Rhodes, Leona Maricle, Ella Logan and Broderick Crawford. Directed by John G. Blystone; associate producer, George Haight; story by Lynn Root and Franklyn Fenton; screen play by Joseph Anthony, Manuel Seff and David Hertz; photographed by Gregg Toland; art director, Richard Day; sets,

Julia Heron; costumes, Omar Kiam; musical direction, Alfred Newman; film editor, Daniel Mandell; assistant director, Eddie Bernoudy. Supporting cast: Charles Halton, Roger Gray, William Jaffrey, George Chandler, Mary Frances Gifford, Alan Bridge, Monte Vandergrift, Jack Baxley, Walter Soderling, Al K. Hall, Dick Cramer. Running time, 70 minutes.

FARCES take liberties with everything, and that includes the standard of film criticism which might be applied when a reviewer is measuring the virtues of this Sam Goldwyn offering. If you read SPECTATOR reviews to help you select the pictures you wish to see, I can be of no use to you in the case of Woman Chases Man. If you like a frothy thing which moves rapidly, is presented handsomely and has outstanding artists like Miriam Hopkins and Joel McCrea wasted in parts which could have been played as well by any two members of a studio stock company; and if you like a generous dash of impossibilities in your screen fare, then you probably will enjoy this farce comedy directed by Jack Blystone.

I enjoyed it. I enjoy seeing Joel McCrea on the screen, no matter what he does; and in a slightly lesser degree I enjoy Miss Hopkins' appearances. They develop all the possibilities of their roles, but the demands of the roles are so elemental any other couple could have played them as well, which is why I say they were wasted in such a trivial story. The same thing goes for Charlie Winninger, Erik Rhodes, Leona Maricle, Ella Logan, and Broderick Crawford. All of them assist in keeping the story hopping along to the almost continous accompaniment of audience laughter. Enter into the mood of it, accept the impossibilities as possibilities because you see them happen, and you will have a nice time. There is no mob scene in the picture, but by way of compensation Sam Goldwyn had Lynn Root, Franklyn Fenton, Joseph Anthony, Manuel Seff and David Hertz collaborate in writing the story.

And having got the thing out of his system, Sam had better go back to his regular business.

Loud, But Entertaining

TURN OFF THE MOON, Paramount. Producer, Miss Fanchon; director, Lewis Seiler; based on story by Mildred Harrington; screen play, Marguerite Roberts, Harlan Ware and Paul Gerard Smith; musical director, Boris Morros; music and lyrics, Sam Coslow; arrangements, Victor Young and Phil Boutelje; vocal supervision, Al Siegel and Max Terr; photographer, Ted Tetzlaff; art director, Hans Dreier; dance director, LeRoy Prinz; costumes, Edith Head; assistant director, Edgar Anderson. Cast: Charlie Ruggles, Eleanor Whitney, Johnny Downs, Kenny Baker, Phil Harris and Orchestra, Ben Blue, Marjorie Gateson, Grady Sutton, Romo Vincent, Andrew Tombes, Constance Bergen, Franklin Pangborn, Albee Sisters, Christy and Gould, The Fanchonettes.

WHETHER its volume of sound was put into it at its source or only happened to come out at the preview, I do not know, but I do know Turn Off the Moon, as I heard it, is the loudest musical picture we have had. It is difficult to estimate the merits of a screen offering when the feature of its showing which commands your chief attention is the unnecessary din it is creating. If you are indifferent to noise, or if the noise at the preview was the fault of the gentleman who presides over the gadgets in the projection booth, I can recommend Turn Off the

Moon to you as being fully up to the average standard set by the season's music-dance-spectacle features. It is the first screen production of Fanchon and suggests no reason why Paramount should regret its action in adding her name to its roster of producers.

The story is frankly a bunch of nonsense which at no stage asks the audience to take it seriously. At first it gives promise of developing a pretty romance between Eleanore Whitney, a cute little thing with big, wondering eyes and nimble dancing feet, and Johnny Downs, a good looking boy with the screen's greatest box-office asset, an engaging personality. To please an audience, all the two of them have to do is to play themselves. The development of the romance, however, is purely mechanical; they meet, love, quarrel, separate, meet again, love again, all in a space of a few hours. And to remind us it is a standard screen romance, the last we see of them is in a fervid embrace with its customary kiss embellishment. The Academy should hang up a prize for the first writer who can devise another ending for a screen romance.

WHERE Fanchon was given an opportunity to reflect on the screen her long experience in staging dance spectacles, the new producer is at her best. One number was particularly impressive. A group of girls, carrying a cloud of bubbles on their shoulders, their feet on large globes which they propel in a series of evolutions, is a real novelty in the way of ensemble presentations. Paramount has given the picture an elaborate and pictorially effective production, Hans Dreier excelling himself in designing sets. Their visual values are developed fully by the expert photography of Ted Tetzlaff.

Sam Coslow contributes both the words and music for four songs which should be well up on the season's list of popular numbers. Johnny Downs reveals himself as no mean singer. Kenny Baker, Romo Vincent and Phil Harris also please with their vocal efforts. For the first time in the credit list, I see "vocal supervision," which was entrusted to Al Siegel and Max Terr, the wisdom of their choice being made apparent by the commendable results achieved. Ben Blue's clever comedy pretty nearly steals the show. Charlie Ruggles gives us his usual brand of comedy, but reads his lines much too loudly and without shading to match the moods of his various scenes. He maintains an even level of loudness which finally becomes monotonous. Grady Sutton and Romo Vincent give satisfactory performances and Franklin Pangborn sparkles in a couple of scenes.

To Lewis Seiler goes boundless credit for his masterly handling of the widely diversified elements he had at his command. It is no easy task to create smooth forward progression of audience appeal with a script composed so largely of interpolated numbers, but Lew manages to do it.

Is Much too Noisy

DANCE, CHARLIE, DANCE, Warner release of a First National picture. Associate producer, Bryan Foy; directed by Frank McDonald; from the play, THE BUTTER AND EGG MAN, by George S. Kaufman; screen play by Crane Wilbur and William Jacobs; music and lyrics by M. K. Jerome and Jack Scholl; photographed by Warren Lynch; assistant director, Sherry Shourds; film editor,

Frank Magee; art director, Carl Jules Weyl; dialogue director, Harry Seymour; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Stuart Erwin, Jean Muir, Glenda Farrell, Allen Jenkins, Addison Richards, Charles Foy, Chester Clute, Mary Treen, Collette Lyons, Tommy Wonder, Frank Faylen, Robert Homans, Harvey Clark, Olive Olson. Running time, 64 minutes.

ANYONE who can stand a full hour of shouting by Allen Jenkins should see Dance, Charlie, Dance. For others, there is not a great deal in the picture to recommend it as satisfactory entertainment. Frank Mc-Donald is one of the most promising young directors in the business, already having given us in Smart Blonde one of the most brilliantly directed productions of last year. This time he was given an exceedingly poor scriptand Allen Jenkins, two handicaps which the most experienced director in Hollywood could not overcome sucessfully. It seems impossible to get Jenkins to stop yelling his way through the picture in which he appears. Other of his productions have demonstrated McDonald's appreciation of the value of dialogue carried on in ordinary conversational tones, so obviously it must have been in spite of the director's desires that Jenkins spoils Dance, Charlie, Dance for those who like to keep their nerves intact while viewing screen entertainment. In other pictures his irritating voice ruined his scenes, but in each case I attributed it to poor direction.

In his office Jenkins discusses his business affairs loudly enough to be heard throughout the building; in precisely the same tone addresses his wife, his partner and his secretary, until the sound of his voice was about all the impression I carried away from the preview. If Allen has anything else to contribute to the screen, it is high time

he was trotting it out.

It is the talkiest talkie we have had in a long time, and the efforts of the other players to keep up with Jenkins makes the din terrific. I admit, however, that it was greeted with much audience laughter, so possibly my obsession for a quieter screen makes me a poor judge of its entertainment qualities. Better see it and decide for yourself. Stu Erwin is, as always, excellent in his role of a smalltown boy, and Jean Muir and Glenda Farrell give excellent performances. Charlie Foy also does good work, further establishing himself as a capable comedian.

Reviews by Paul Jacobs

Good One from Metro

THE THIRTEENTH CHAIR, Metro production and release. Directed by George B. Seitz; screen play by Marion Parsonnet; from the play by Bayard Veiller; musical score by David Snell; art director, Cedric Gibbons, with associates, Eddie Imazu and Edwin B. Willis; photographed by Charles Clarke; film editor, W. Donn Hayes; assistant director, Marvin Stuart. Cast: Madge Evans, Lewis Stone, Elissa Landi, Thomas Beck, Henry Daniell, Janet Beecher, Dame May Whitty, Ralph Forbes, Holmes Herbert, Heather That-cher, Charles Trowbridge, Robert Coote, Elsa Buchanan, Lal Chand Mehra, Neil Fitzgerald, Louis Vincelot. Running time, 62 minutes.

CERIOUS is the word for Metro. No other Hollywood studio seems to take the painfully meticulous care M.G.M. insists upon for every film which bears its crest. The Thirteenth Chair is an excellent example. Having chosen the story, a psychological study, Metro set about

to give us the finest talent their vast resources commands. And that is Metro all over. Knowing full well that phases of The Thirteenth Chair are not film material, and that it can never be popular fare, was no deterent. And so this profoundly stirring document of the emotions comes

to us packed with the pick of filmdom.

Of primary importance, is the outstanding direction of George B. Seitz. Faced with a series of delicately balanced emotional threads, Mr. Seitz gives us the very last drop of entertainment the script affords-and there is more than plenty of it. His direction is subtle, never melodramatic, never strained, always undulent with the easy grace of utter command. "Direction is the picture," and Mr. Seitz is an artist.

And speaking of artists, I remember the exquisite photography of Charles Clarke as one of the highlights in a star-glittering array. Mr. Clarke seems to realize the significant relationship between mood and setting. Another particularly smooth element in this beautifully balanced film is the discriminate editing of W. Donn Hayes. There is no more important person than the editor. And the cutting of The Thirteenth Chair has induced and sustained the filmic rhythm director Seitz so carefully worked out.

AND by the way, David Snell's musical treatment is perfect. It must be because I cannot remember having heard any music. And therein lies the purpose of film music. I can remember only the shifting, swirling turbulance of emotions that raced through me. The music fulfilled its appointed mission-it built, sustained, inferred and drew my emotional response. Thus, Mr. Snell's music is deserving of respectful appreciation. For the life of me, I cannot remember a note.

It seems hardly necessary to add that Bayard Veiller's play has been given magnificent adaptation by Marion Parsonnet. Metro has the knack of hiring the best in

every department.

And that takes us to the really difficult task. To give fair credit to each performance would necessitate another hour and a dozen pages. So let me swim through without pausing. Even among the panoply of perfection, the characterization of Dame May Whitty is sharply outstanding. It is one of this year's best, without question. Madge Evans brings us the unusual combination of dramatic itelligence, arresting beauty and magnetic personality. It can't be beat.

HE name Lewis Stone writes its own praises. No one actor so consistently hits the peak of entertainment value as does Mr. Stone. Elissa Landi again brings the unusual impressiveness that sets its stamp on every film she graces. And the boy, Thomas Beck, is grand, striking the note of "good egg." And now for one of my particular favorites, Henry Daniell. I have seen him only once before, but I shall never forget the sheer perfection of his artistry. Mr. Daniell is one of our very best. And his job in The Thirteenth Chair again is a master-

Ralph Forbes, handsome and well-bred as usual, turns in his expectedly finished work, and Janet Beecher is excellent in a difficult role. The rest of the cast, troupers

all, give The Thirteenth Chair its comprehensive flavor. Especially effective are Holmes Herbert, Heather Trowbridge, Robert Coote and Elsa Buchanan. Interesting commentary on M.G.M. thoroughness is shown in their selection of Lal Chand Mehra, outstanding Hindu philosopher and professor, to play an outstanding Hindue professor. Metro is like that, thorough. And so is The Thirteenth Chair.

Another O'Brien Opus

HOLLYWOOD COWBOY, George A. Hirliman production for R.K.O. release. Associate producer, Leonard Goldstein; original screen play by Dan Jarrett and Ewing Scott; directed by Ewing Scott; production manager, Joe Dill; photographed by Frank B. Good; supervising editor, Robert Crandall; musical director, Abe Meyer; art director, F. Paul Sylos; assistant director, George Sherman; recording by Winston Moore. Cast: George O'Brien, Cecilia Parker, Maude Eburne, Joe Caits, Frank Milan, Charles Middleton, Lee Shumway, Walter De Palma, Al Hill, William Royle, Al Herman, Frank Hagney, Dan Wolheim, Slim Baulch, Sid Jordan, Lester Dorr, Harold Daniels. Running time, 60 minutes.

HOLLYWOOD'S most engaging man of muscle gives nanother of his uniformly entertaining performances. Not since Tom Mix, has any athlete so consistently held the action audience as has George O'Brien. I am a typical example. I have my personal and peculiar tastes; I am hard to please, my filmic appetite is offensively discriminate—but I rush, whooping joyfully, at the call to review an O'Brien picture. And enter the sacred portals with a sigh of always-to-be fulfilled satisfaction. I am the typical western fan. And my name is legion. I wish producers would get wise to the fact that all the world loves a western.

I had better add immediately that George A. Hiriman has my effusive vote of thanks. He has produced many westerns and he knows his stuff. It is a relief to know a producers who knows his stuff. As usual, he has chosen the best to work with him. Don Jarrett and Ewing Scott, for example, give us a swell story, about the idolized film cowboy who goes western and shows the cow-country how cowpunchers should punch their cows. Not content with this twist, Mr. Jarrett and Mr. Scott mix in cleverly a dash of racketeering, eastern flavor, and a shot of aeronautics—all blended to taste and here, by the way, is an almost unique condition. The versatile Mr. Scott also directed. That a director colloborated on his own story is nothing new; but that a director writes a good story, or that a writer does a good job of direction is news. Mr. Scott knows the rare combination of dramatic and cinematic values. He is on the way to the top.

MART editing by Robert Crandall and the vivid photographics of Frank B. Good add the extra something that marks the difference between a top class B and a low C. Cecilia Parker wears her trim riding habit to distinct advantage, and her smile, to amazing effect—on George. Maude Eburne, grand old trouper, brings us a smile—provoking sketch of what the old West can produce in hard riding, straight-shooting womanhood.

On a par with the humor is the fast-paced portrayal of Joe Caits. As George's sour-puss pal he utilizes every opportunity with genuine skill and dispatch. In abrupt contrast of type, but equally effective, is the artful silliness of Frank Milan, who foils O'Brien's vibrant vigor with artistic cream-puffiness. Charles Middleton turns in his usual dependable and workmanlike job, and Lee Shumway, Water De Palma, Al Hill, Wm. Roylo, Frank Hagney, in fact all the support, gives us the effortless and finished work of the truly competent cast. See it. It's good.

Reviews by CAllan Hersholt

Mr. Winninger's Cappy Ricks

THE GO-GETTER, Warners release of Cosmopolitan production. Hal B. Wallis, executive producer; Sam Bischoff, associate producer; directed by Busby Berkeley; original story by Peter B. Kyne; screen play by Delmer Daves; photographed by Arthur Edeson; William Holmes, film editor; Irving Rapper, dialogue director; gowns by Orry-Kelly; musical direction by Leo F. Forbstein; assistant director, Russ Saunders. Cast: George Brent, Anita Louise, Charles Winninger, John Eldredge, Henry O'Neill, Joseph Crehan, Gordon Oliver, Eddie Acuff, Willard Robertson, Herbert Rawlinson, Pierre Watkin, Helen Valkis, Helen Lowell, Harry Beresford, Minerva Urecal, Mary Treen, Edward Price, Ed Gargan, George Humbert. Running time, 92 minutes.

*HARLES WINNINGER, for years one of the stage's Coutstanding comics, contributes much toward making this comprehensively mounted picture a lively one that undoubtedly will please audiences seeking light diversion. The Winninger characterization of Cappy Ricks surely moves him into the first rank of screen personalities, his work and the manner in which it was received by witnesses giving the firm conviction that to him will come significant film stardom. And while this player is largely responsible for the success achieved by Go-Getter, his performance has a flaw that is of more than minor importance. He delivers not a small quantity of his numerous speeches in a tone seemingly loud enough to be heard by a completely deaf person. Which brings into the splendid characterization a most unwelcome, jarring air of the stage and displays a lack of cinematic wisdom. I have viewed Winninger on the screen several times and have found such dialogue delivery heretofore foreign to his work, so it is only natural that I lay blame to Busby Berkeley, director, and Irving Rapper, dialogue director.

F ACT that this plot, done on the screen scores of times before, will be recognized by you in the neighborhood of reel one, and that you will know what the balance of the picture is to bring, does not mean that Go-Getter will not hold your undivided interest. You will be genuinely absorbed by it—not because of the story, but because of the manner in which it is told. Therefore we are presented with a good example of the unimportance of story and the importance of its telling.

It is unusual for Busby Berkeley to direct a picture that contains no melodious numbers, no musical atmosphere whatever, and his handling of this Cosmopolitan production for Warners, aside from the dialogue delivery already mentioned, is splendid, showing him to be possessed of a fine sense of humanness, humor and drama. He was indeed fortunate to be handed a script written

by Delmar Daves, whose work always is highly commendable. The *Go-Getter* screen play is one of Daves' finest jobs, an intelligently executed piece of writing, rich in scintillating humor.

The cast is a fine one, Anita Louise, George Brent, John Eldredge, Henry O'Neill and each of the others doing magnificently. Of high order is Arthur Edeson's camera work.

Praise for Jane

ANGEL'S HOLIDAY, 20th-Fox picture and release. John Stone, associate producer; directed by James Tinling; original story and screen play by Lynn Root and Frank Fenton; photographed by Daniel B. Clark; art direction by Bernard Herzbrun; Nick De Maggio, film editor; musical direction by Samuel Kaylin; song, THEY BLEW THEMSELVES OUT OF BREATH, by Harold Howard and Bill Telaak. Cast: Jane Withers, Robert Kent, Joan Davis, Sally Blane, Harold Huber, Frank Jenks, Ray Walker, John Qualen, Lon Chaney, Jr., Al Lydell, Russell Hopton, Paul Hurst, John Kelly, George Taylor, Cy Kendall, Charles Arnt. Running time, 75 mins.

If the preview spectator's reaction is any criterion, this almost utterly unbelievable photoplay, tomfoolery of the broadest kind, will be relished by many, particularly adolescents. At its showing, the theatre was well sprinkled with youthful beholders, and they greeted much of it in a tumultuously approving fashion, often giving vent to loud, forceful laughter, and virgorously applauding and shouting. Elders present were not so expressive in their response, but appeared to be enjoying themselves.

Logic plays a very minor part in Angel's Holiday, and I suggest that you do not patronize the picture if you feel yourself unable to find satisfaction in an hour of quite insane entertainment, in humor with a decided Sennett flavor. Obviously fabricated at little expense, the offering seems altogether capable of single-handedly car-

rying a program where audiences are not difficult to please. Sophisticated spectators are expected to frown upon it.

Superior to any recent Jane Withers feature, its craziness at times creditable with being somewhat adroit, it discloses scripting that is both good and inadequate, former sort the more evident, and it presents a generally excellent piece of direction, successful portrayals and impressive photography. Frank Fenton and Lynn Root have supplied little Jane Withers with some far too stilted speeches, the kind one would expect an Oxford professor to deliver, and frequently the child tops such a piece of dialogue with childish grammatical errors. There is no point to this and surely no humor in it.

Found in the wealth of comedy are some situations of utter and disheartening conventionality, well accepted by the previewers. Much of the picture is too loud, dialogue being shouted, for which I blame the director, James Tinling, whose work otherwise is faultless. An above-average perception of comedy values is evident in his brisk direction.

Angel's Holiday gives us the talented Jane Withers at her best. The lengthy and enthusiastic response which the audience awarded her farcical interpretation of a musical number was well deserved. Throughout she performs cleverly. Robert Kent contributes his customary stiff and lifeless performance, while Sally Blane, cast opposite him, is charming and fully convincing. Frank Jenks, given his best opportunity to date, does superbly, and notably good are Harold Huber, Joan Davis, Ray Walker, Al Lydell, Paul Hurst, John Qualen and Russell Hopton.

If Pictures Had Started as Talkies

(The sixth of a series of special articles by the Editor on the theory and practice of motion picture production.)

MOTION picture's embrace of an audience widens in the degree it eliminates the intellect as a factor in its enjoyment. I have urged so often in my writings that the cinema is emotional, not intellectual, diversion, I have been interpreted as rating it as entertainment for morons only. For every Great Mind to be found in a film studio there are a few million outside who can keep ahead of him on any intellectual path he chooses to take. The screen's instant capture of the public fancy was due, not to lack of intellectual attainment in its creations, but to its power to present dramatic entertainment in a manner which did not require the cooperation of the intellect in its enjoyment, its appeal being direct to the emotions through the visual sense. I wrote in a previous Spec-TATOR that the fact of our possession of intellects is not a reason for our exercising them in a film theatre, as our possession of legs is not a reason for our running up and down the aisle while we are viewing a screen offering. Our minds rested before a silent screen as our bodies rested in the seats the theatre provided, thus it was the lack of *necessity* for the exercise of our intellects when presented with basically intellectual entertainment, which gave the medium universal appeal and brought it an audience composed of all degrees of intelligence.

Hugo Munsterberg over twenty years ago in his The Photoplay: A Psychological Study, divided the functions of the picture audience mind into the processes of attention, of imagination, of suggestion, of division of interest and of emotion. No matter how underdeveloped any intellect in an audience may be, it is capable of functioning as completely within the limits of its development as can the most highly developed intellect. But let us examine the form a motion picture takes to rid the intellect of the necessity for objective functioning.

THE mission of Art is to interpret nature, not to recreate it. We will segregate a fragment of real life, present it as such, and then outline the cinema's process of recreating it to reduce to a minimum its demand for our intellectual cooperation.

As A leaves his offices building his attention is attracted to a commotion in the street. He wonders what is

happening; looks in each direction; sees a crowd at a corner; pushes his way through it with the help of a police officer who salutes him. On the pavement is stretched the body of a man, above him stands a policeman who with one hand clutches the arm of a man (B), in his other hand a revolver. A is puzzled, somewhat disturbed, when he sees B. Where has he seen him before? Memory stirs. In Paris? In Moscow? In the South Seas? He has it-Hong Kong-that night when B saved him from arrest-and now B, the only person who could strip him of his mask of respectability, stands in front of him, apparently a murderer. He imagines the possibilities of B's recognition of him-his own arrest, imprisonment; but, still-B once helped him. Should he now do something to help B? On one side A has peace, happiness, respectability; on the other, disgrace, and poverty if he is to make restitution of the proceeds of his crime. A police car arrives, B, his eyes still downcast, is thrust into it; it drives off. A looks after it, squares his shouldders, takes a few steps in the direction it took; stops, turns, with drooping shoulders, walks in the opposite direction.

Now we are sitting in the audience viewing the above sequence of events being presented on the screen without the aid of dialogue. Our attention is caught by A's start of attention as he reaches the sidewalk. Our memory is stirred by his as we go back with him over his travels; we remember the Eiffel Tower means Paris, the Kremlin means Moscow, as the screen pictorially keeps abreast of A's thoughts. Our imagination makes us see things through A's eyes. There is suggestion of A's importance in the officers's salute, a suggestion of the height from which he will fall if B tells what he knows. There is division of interest—will he save himself or risk losing himself if he aids B? The sequence abounds in emotion.

In a book, an author could enthral us with his word picture of the situation in which A finds himself; could carry us back on a journey of literary delight to the dark days of A's adventures, but it would be purely intellectual entertainment; we would know A and B were creatures of the author's brain, that they had no existence outside the covers of the book.

By no possibility could the sequence as we see it be presented on the stage. Its story values could be recited in dialogue by people playing parts, which, again, would be purely intellectual diversion. No painter could put it on a canvas, no sculptor carve it in marble.

WHEN we in the audience view the sequence on the screen, we see neither people from a book nor people playing parts; we hear no explanations, have no mental problems. The conflict of emotions, the reason for them, the antecedent incidents which affect the present situations, all are woven into a single pattern which we absorb completely without objective mental effort. It is a visual message direct to our emotions and without pause for intellectual analysis. Each of us gets out of it—not what is put into it at its source—but what he puts into it; the degree of entertainment he derives from

it being determined by the use to which his imagination puts what is presented to his eyes. He sees a fragment of real life, two-dimensional images which his imagination makes plastic, images of people to whom he ascribes the emotions which are stirring him. It is the customer who gives the merchandise the quality which makes it readily saleable.

Automobile manufacturers strive to stimulate their market by some slight change in design or the addition of some device to make a car's interior more inviting, but they do not take liberties with the fundamental mechanical principles which make it possible for the car to go. Airplanes are of various designs, are made for various uses, constantly are trying out new ideas, but the one thing never tampered with is the principle which keeps them in the air. The quality which made motion pictures go, which maintain them, is the one thing which should have come through the sound revolution unmarred and untouched. Instead, however, it was thrown out bodily. Its appeal was changed from emotional to intellectual.

Relaxation is the merchandise the screen industry has for sale. In the silent era the business was good because the nature of the merchandise enabled the customer to get in full measure what he was buying. Every visit to a film theatre provided him with complete relaxation, consequently time and money were the only determining factors in regulating the number of his visits. He could not very well grow tired of a form of entertainment which did not tire him. With the advent of talkies came a change in the nature of the product which added saturation to time and money as considerations affecting the regularity of attendance. The relaxing qualities of the product were eliminated.

N the previous SPECTATOR a formula was outlined for the presentation of the cinematic value of screen productions despite the inclusion of the alien element of audible dialogue. It was argued then that no fault could be found with the use of the spoken word as an effective agency in expediting the telling of stories, that making the manufacturing process difficult by striving for cinematic perfection was unwise when the market would be satisfied with something less. At the same time it was admitted that talkies have a legitimate place in screen entertainment. As they have no place in screen art, our consideration of them as items of entertainment will have to be based on their status as articles of commerce.

The main asset of any paying business is its stability, the even inward flow of earnings and the steadiness of operating expenses. Such conditions can result only from continuous selling in a stable market—from the public's habit of consuming the product offered it. The greatest asset the film industry can acquire is the public's habit of attending picture theatres. When pictures were silent the habit was a fixed one. It made little difference what was showing on the screen, box-office receipts not varying greatly from week to week. Of course, when Mary Pickford, Valentino, Charlie Chaplin or some other star of outstanding popularity came along, receipts de-

scribed an upward curve, but on the whole, business was steady and when a year started the exhibitor could guess pretty closely how he would stand financially when it ended.

Only since we have had talkies have there been wide flunctuations in box-office receipts. The business of exhibiting motion pictures has ceased to be stable. It does make a difference now what picture is showing. The exhibitor no longer can estimate in advance what his year's receipts will be, and while he optimistically awaits the advent of a miracle of some sort, he considers himself lucky if at the end of his fiscal year his books come within reasonable distance of balancing, Responsible for such conditions is the fact that the public now shops for its screen entertainment and no longer patronizes it as a habit. And the blame for the cessation of the habit belongs to the makers of the screen entertainment the public is getting.

BEFORE we determine the ligitimate place of the talkie in the program of screen entertainment, let us embark upon an adventure into supposition; let us for a moment forget motion pictures and consider how I light my pipe. At home I light it with a globular lighter about the size of a baseball. In my pocket I carry a smaller, flat one. I have to keep them supplied with fuel, flints and wicks. Let us suppose man never perfected lighting beyond the flint stage, had never discovered friction would cause fire, that the present mechanical system of lighting is the only one of which we have knowledge. A man, we will suppose, comes into my garden where I am writing now and finds me working my lighter to get my pipe going. He displays a little cardboard folder with a flap on it and a double column of readheaded uprights in it.

"Why do you monkey with that contraption?" he asks, referring to my lighter. "As often as not it refuses to work; you have to attend to it regularly or it won't work at all. Now this little jigger always works. These things are called matches. You tear off one like this, scratch it so—and there's the light for your pipe! You blow it out, throw it away, and that is all there is to it."

What would I do? I am quite sure I would throw away my mechanical lighters with their fluid tanks, flints and wicks, and adopt the more modern and greatly simplified method of lighting my pipe. Matches, I would conclude, marked an advance in man's ingenuity, and my desire would be to keep up with the times. I am too old to relish being thought old-fashioned.

NOW let us suppose motion pictures started as talkies, that they never had been silent, always had told their stories in dialogue, always had been intellectual diversion, never had relied upon the camera to furnish visual entertainment which allowed the intellect to relax while only the emotions were exercised; and suppose, instead of writing this, I am finishing the last scene of a picture which I, as a producer instead of an editor, am about to make into a talkie. Suppose another man comes into my garden, manipulates my cumbersome lighter and starts his pipe.

"Are you aware you are a consummate ass?" he asks by way of a friendly opening. "You and your fellow producers are turning out screen entertainment whose nature places a definite limit on its market. People seek entertainment for its relaxing quality, to give their minds a rest. You are giving them entertainment which exercises their minds," and he goes on to advance a lot of other arguments already presented in preceding articles in this Spectator series.

"Now," he goes on, "I have thought of something new in the way of picture production, something which should double your market by taking in the children and all those who are looking for mental rest instead of the mental stimulation you now provide them—a kind of entertainment which will hold its present market and give it greater satisfaction than it is enjoying now. It is a simple process and if you were not entirely ignorant of the kind of business you are in, if you knew its potentialities—in short, if you were not a damned fool, you'd have thought of it yourself."

Y visitor goes on: "The whole idea is to make your entertainment visual-to aim it at the eyes and the emotions, not at the ears and the intellects, as you are doing now. Stop making your stories literal. Give your audience suggestions and allow it to write its own stories; let each imagination see in the story what pleases it most, and let it fashion for itself the kind of entertainment which pleases it most. Don't let it hear a single speech not essential to its understanding of the story. Cut out the good-morning-Mr. Smiths and all the other silly speeches your audience has to listen to for fear it will miss something essential to the scene. It is all a question of camera technique, of having your camera move forward and backward, of bringing the characters close enough to the audience to enable it to hear the absolutely essential speeches, and keeping it at a distance to make it reasonable that it would not hear non-essential jabbering.

"What crowd are you after, the one composed of people who use their minds in their work and want entertainment which will rest them, or the one composed of people who do not use their minds at their work and welcome mental exercise at night? The first crowd so vastly outnumbers the second that if you have any business brains you will go after it. You can satisfy it without dissatisfying the other. There are plenty of screen craftsmen who can put box-office value in your product if you will keep your own hands off and let them do it."

WHAT would I do? I would follow my visitor's advice. I would think I was stealing a march on other producers by starting a revoltion in picture production, introducing something new, which would increase the boxoffice value of my pictures. Soon all the other producers would adopt the new technique and the film industry as a whole would enjoy a prosperity never known to it previously. The new product would be so easy of assimilation the public soon would fall into the habit of attending film theatres irrespective of what was showing. The man whose desire for entertainment is satisfied now by

one talkie a week, would contract the habit of taking in two or three motion pictures.

Then, you well may ask, why do producers now persist in making talkies, which limit their market, instead of motion pictures, which would enlarge it? The answer is an interesting study in psychology. Screen art is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the film industry. The financial aspect of screen entertainment production is so predominant, the heads of the producing organizations of necessity must be businessmen. Business management and artistic achievement rarely are bedded in the same brain. There are screen artists who have business sense, but as the art to them is more absorbing than the business, fashioning art creations more fascinating than making money, they are content to let others control the finances. But the great majority of screen artists are not businessmen. They are craftsmen to whom their art appeals more strongly than the financial return it yields. Without knowledge of business methods, without inclination to learn them, the film industry would not get far as an industry if they controlled its destinies.

TRUCTURALLY, no fault can be found with the picture organization as a whole. Its weakness lies in its operation. The business men who control it are not content merely to conduct its business. They control the expenditure of vast sums of money, have under their command great armies of employes. Most of them were raised to their present heights by the lifting power of the industry which grew up under them-not by virtue of their efforts, but by the sheer strength of the screen as an entertainment medium. Being human, and their sense of relative values being benumbed somewhat by contemplation of their power and their accidental importance, it is natural they should regard themselves as authorities on the process of manufacture of their product, should deem themselves as capable of determining how a picture should be made as they are of deciding how it should be sold.

These men have decided pure cinema technique is old fashioned, just as the mechanical lighter addict decides matches are old fashioned. The fact that all lighters do not work and all matches do-that all talkies do not make money and all silent pictures did-is outside the range of the film producer's reasoning. His annual earnings are so great they have hypnotized him into the belief he can give value for them even without thinking. He dictates to picture artists, but knows nothing of the art; and his business intelligence has not been developed to the point of realization that it is the degree in which film art is reflected in film entertainment which must determine the financial fate of the industry. He pays absurdly large salaries for picture brains, but will not permit the brains to function beyond the limits of his own cinematic convictions. It is a case of businessmen controlling an art and not knowing enough about the business to let the art alone.

THE case of Sonja Henie is an interesting demonstration of production psychology which has been demonstrated in hundreds of other cases, all of which its recital

will illuminate. This attractive young girl who has developed figure skating into high art, had charmed audiences in world capitals before anyone thought of her possibilities as a screen attraction. Finally, however, someone realized them and she was presented in *One in a Million*. In scenes preceding her appearance on the ice, Sonja is revealed as a charming girl, one to earn the instant affection of the audience. Possessed of that beauty which charm of personality makes irregularity of features unimportant, a warmly sympathetic speaking voice and a fascinating smile, she could have gained favor without displaying her skating skill.

So cleverly has she been presented in these opening scenes, she is not to us just a professional skater when she takes the ice. She is our friend, a nice girl we know, one in whose affairs we have become interested, who has our sympathy and well wishes. When she enters the Olympic contest our desire to see her, our friend, win the award is greater than our desire to witness a skating performance. When her amazing grace, the rhythm of her movements, the lilting poetry composed by her swaying form, are revealed to us, it is the fact our friend is making good which appeals more powerful to our emotions than they would react solely to the esthetic charms of her effortless mastery of her art. One in a Million was a box-office success. A well made picture with an interesting story and a strong cast, still most of the credit must go to Sonja Henie, and her portion of it can be divided equally between the charm of her personality and her skill as a skater.

THE success of Sonja's picture immediately sent producers scurrying for other figure skaters to appear on the screen. Several films featuring ice skating were given a place on the season's production programs. The other day I sat in the office of the head of one of the largest producing organizations and listened while he explained why these pictures were being made. Audience desire in the way of screen entertainment, he stated, runs in cycles—today it wants one thing, tomorrow another. Two years ago he would not have made a skating picture. The public was not ready for it. Today the public is skating conscious, and until its fancy veers to something else—until the advent of another cycle which the astute producer in some mysterious way can sense in advance—skating will be provided it in a series of pictures.

"An important part of my duties," my friend concluded, "is to see that my organization keeps abreast of public taste."

ON the surface, plausible reasoning; but let us analyze it. Is it only today that you have acquired a taste for the poetry of motion, for the esthetic allurement of a charming young woman's amazing grace, for the rhythmic agility with which she flashes from one intricate figure to another? Is some mysterious cycle responsible for the enjoyment Sonja Henie's skill gave you? Would you not have enjoyed it equally two years ago, a dozen years ago? No, says the film industry, two years ago your esthetic demands were for something else.

Prior to the incident of the apple, the graceful swaying in the breeze of the blossomed branches of the apple tree, the rhythmic murmuring of a brook as it curved gently around a bend, the artistic lines which nature draws, must have played their parts in making Adam and Eve enjoy the esthetic pleasures the Garden of Eden afforded them. And what of the ballet? When did it start? Certainly not in the past two years. The fact is that the poetry of motion was the earliest manifestation of man's appreciaion of the esthetic, was the first step in his esthetic development. Sonja Henie's skating would have delighted Adam and Eve and all their descendants from them until now. That, of course, makes it too old-fashioned for recognition by motion picture producers, who deem even motion picture art too old-fashioned to be given a place in motion picture creations.

(By way of explanation, I would like to add a personal note here. These articles are not charted; I am not writing from notes, not following a plan. I merely am exploring mentally the motion picture situation as I see it and setting down my thoughts in the order in which they crowd into my mind. A few thousand words back I stated the goal of the foregoing article to be the placing of the talkie where it belongs in the screen entertainment program. I had the goal before me as I wrote and what I have written has brought me closer to it, but I had no idea so many words would strew the path to its attainment. I hope to reach it in the next article, but I make no promises.)

Leave Them Alone

FILM WEEKLY, an outstanding English publication, may be relied upon in each issue to express some thoughts which have application to picture production in general. Under the above heading, it has this to say:

When will Hollywood learn that it doesn't pay to try to turn character actors into stars?

In two weeks the West End has been given three examples of the deplorable waste of time, thought and talent which results from attempting to concoct starring vehicles for character actors. Last week there were Edward Arnold in John Meade's Woman and Charlie Ruggles in Mind Your Own Business. This week brings Victor McLaglen in Sea Devils. All three are excellent actors, strongly individual types; the kind of players who are a tremendous asset to any film in which they appear in good supporting roles. These pictures will not do any of them any good. None of the three was ever meant to be a

Sidney Blackmer 20th Century-Fox star, and the process of trying to retain the precarious stardom which has been thrust upon them entails compromises and restrictions which are contrary to all the proved principles of picture-making.

To begin with, pictures are expected to have a love interest. On the other hand, filmgoers do not take easily to the spectacle of a middle-aged, unromantic-looking hero. Usually, therefore, pictures which star such a player have to divide interest artificially between the central character and a subsidiary love-interest. Then, a character actor's appeal is based not only upon personality but on a specific characterization. This means that a formula has to be evolved which is even more arbitrary than those devised for glamour stars, and becomes even more quickly stereotyped.

Edward Arnold has become permanently the ruthless business-man who loves and loses. The familiar Ruggles characterization, lovably dithering and inefficient, grows weaker and staler with each successive domestic comedy. For McLaglen every starring subject has to be distorted to provide for the Sergeant Flagg character which he created in the silent era. None of them shines nearly so consistently as in supporting roles. Arnold has never seemed so securely established since he became a star. Ruggles was infinitely more refreshing as one of a team in Ruggles of Red Gap, or as comic relief in Lubitsch musicals. The only legitimate star part McLaglen has had in recent years was in The Informer, which was an unrepeatable freak film.

Only such freak films do afford leading parts for middle-aged actors. This is why Film Weekly has always urged that the only sane policy for character players is to star on the rare occasions when such films offer themselves and otherwise to remain in their proper place in supporting roles. Few character players have maintained stardom for long. Marie Dressler was a notable exception—but she died before her popularity could fade. Character players are just as important to a picture as its stars. But they can only be really valuable in their own supporting sphere.

Adele Buffington

"Michael O'Halloran"

Screen Play

In Preparation
"She Didn't Want a Sheik"
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SPECTATOR

Twelfth Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Number 4

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Volume 12

Guild's Great Opportunity Admissions and Picture Costs Intelligent Use of Dialogue Sound's Place on the Screen

Editor's Easy Chair . . . Other Comment

Analytical Reviews

THIS IS MY AFFAIR * THEY GAVE HIM A GUN * THE GIRL SAID NO
HOTEL HAYWIRE * MICHAEL O'HALLORAN * SLIM * NIGHT OF MYSTERY
WINGS OVER HONOLULU * REVOLUTIONISTS

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THIS SPACE CONTRIBUTED BY A FRIEND OF HUNGRY CHILDREN

DELMER DAVE/

Screen Play
"THE GO-GETTER"

The director was indeed fortunate to be handed a script written by Delmer Daves, whose work always is highly commendable. The Go-Getter screen play is one of Daves' finest jobs, an intelligently executed piece of writing, rich in scintillating humor.

-Hollywood Spectator

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> NOW IN HOLLYWOOD

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From the



Editor's Easy Chair

CCEPTING the chatter column's word for the fact A of the journey and its purpose, Joan Bennett is going to do a summer season of stock with a theatrical company somewhere in the East. Her stage-manager will weep when he sees the way she walks, sits down, rises; he will weep more tears when she reads a line. He is going to call picture patrons hopeless low-brows for loving the way Joan does all these things on the screen. He'll show Hollywood! He will send our little Joan back to us with the finger marks of the stage tarnishing the polish which has made her shine on the screen. From one of the most natural players appearing in pictures, she will be made into just another stage actress who will interpret screen roles in terms of the theatre—that is, all this will happen to her if she goes through with her announced intention. Ever since the fascinating personality of Joan first enlivened the screen, I have been one of her most devoted admirers, and as I write I lift my eyes to her autographed photograph upon which above her name is enscribed her appreciation of the nice things I have written about her picture performances. I still am loyal to her as a screen actress, and to prove it I herewith express the hope that she turns out to be the most godawful flop on the stage and that she comes back to us chastened to the point of realization that she belongs wholly to the screen.

A the recent convention of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer salesmen Louis B. Mayer made the statement that theatre admission prices would have to be raised to keep pace with the constant increase in the cost of picture production. For the company, he promised that the increased revenue would not go to the stockholders as dividends, but would be devoted to the making of bigger and better pictures. In the previous Spectator I remarked that "the natural evolution of the million-dollar picture of today is the five-million-dollar picture of tomorrow." Apparently Metro is starting out to prove me a good prophet.

No one can quarrel with the film industry for looking forward in search of variety in its pictures, but it certainly is open to censor for not looking backward for guidance by experience. In every line of human endeavor it is the road already traveled which points the direction it is wise to take as the journey continues. If our present producers were capable of learning anything, they would realize the folly of endeavoring to hold their present market by spending more money on their product. The public is not complaining that the screen entertainment it is getting now does not cost enough at its source. To make it more expensive at its outlet and apply the extra revenue merely to making more extravagant the features in it which the public now is not making profitable, is a sad exhibition of a lack of ordinary business sense.

WHAT ails the present product is the fundamental error it commits in endeavoring to stupefy the public instead of entertaining it. More money would make it more stupefying and less entertaining. It was the simplicity of the screen's expression which built the foundation upon which the film industry rests, and now the foundation is being imperiled by the weight of stupidity it is being asked to bear, a weight producers are seeking means to increase. Raising admission prices will not add to the industry's revenue. It merely will add to the number of possible patrons who do not patronize pictures now. Hollywood's hope of future prosperity lies in its return to past simplicity, in a policy of selling heart-throbs instead of spectacles and personalities instead of actors. It will be a long haul to get back to first principles. The public is not analytical; it does not know why it is losing interest in the screen entertainment it is getting. It probably would resent an abrupt change in fare from elaborate spectacle to simple emotions, but in the long run emotions will bring in two dollars to every one the spectacles are bringing in now. But it is inevitable there will have to be a change of policy to save the industry some rough going. If I were embarking on a career as a producer I would rather have a young girl with personality, and Buck, the big St. Bernard dog, than the two greatest artists the stage ever developed.

HOLLYWOOD is prone to regard the whole industry as prosperous because production activity is great and much money is being spent here. But the people who make pictures cannot enjoy permanent prosperity until those who exhibit the pictures also are prosperous. Theatre-owners throughout the country are disturbed and salesmen of the producing companies are not finding their work as easy as in former selling seasons. The producers' efforts to pass the expense buck to exhibitors in the way of increased rentals is not meeting with complete success. Allied States, an organization of independent theatre-owners, has been making a survey of the sales situation. So far it has enough information to give

just a cross-section view, but it is illuminating. The statement reads: "Early returns from Allied's buying survey indicate that the independent exhibitors are not rushing to sign up at the high rentals asked for 1937-38 deals. Of 170 theatres scattered from Maine to California and from Minnesota to Texas, only thirteen have contracted for product approximating their requirements for the ensuing year. Fourteen theatres have signed up with one company each, and twenty-three have signed up for two or three companies each. One hundred and twenty of the reporting theatres have bought no product of any kind." Harrison's Reports, after publishing the above, adds this paragraph: "The same tendency seems to prevail in this territory—abstention from buying early, for the exhibitors have found out from experience that, when the season gets well under way, they are able to get a better idea what each producer is going to offer. Consequently they are in a better position to know what it is worth." It is obvious exhibitors have devolped a "show-me" complex, and it is getting increasingly difficult for producers to show them. It is a situation which would give pause to an industry endowed with ability to think in terms of the fundamentals of its business. Only the film industry is capable of trying to improve its financial situation by making its product worse and charging more for it.

ONE thing Darryl Zanuck might claim in defense of his action in putting Gypsy Lee on the screen, is that undressing on the stage is just as good training for a screen career as acting on the stage is.

MENTAL Meanderings: The papers were filled with it, but I didn't seem able to get het up over the coronation.... The producer said to the two writers who disagreed in a story conference, "Come, come, boys; don't be like the dog in the manger-always quarrelling among yourselves." . . . To my way of thinking, the peak of bad taste is for two people to take a kissing pose for a newspaper photograph, and it is just as bad taste for a newspaper to publish such stuff.... One of the finest speaking voices in pictures is that of Vernon Steele. whom we see on the screen too seldom.... Same producer broke up a squabble between same two collaborators at another story conference by stating emphatically that it was time he was taking the white elephant by the horns. . . . Seventh Heaven is the strangest jumble of foreign accents any picture has had.... Terrific excitement around the old homestead this morning; Sophie, the sanguine duck who has been sitting on three wild duck eggs for weeks, brought forth a wild ducklet, much to the astonishment of Bo Peep, the Peke, and to the total indifference of Phoebe, the spaniel, who seems to regard it as just another of those things.... Huntly Gordon on the golf links. Why can't we see him on the screen? There are a lot of people who would welcome his appearance.... A hunk of ice cream hidden under a mess of crushed strawberries will suit me any time in the way of dessert.... Heard H. M. Robertson on the radio advising dog owners to get rid of spear grass in their gardens as the spears play the devil with dog's feet, ears and nostrils; for the past hour I've been humping around the ground on my sitdowner, digging up the infernal stuff. Had difficulty in straightening up again. Is radio really necessary?... When those friends who chided me for rooting and voting for Landon get through paying Roosevelt taxes, they might drop in and apologize. But the second Roosevelt administration will have one accomplishment to its credit: It will prove Vermont and Maine were right.... Apartment dwellers had better skip this one: I've just come in from cutting an armful of Talisman roses—nuggets of pure gold on stems a foot-and-a-half long.

COME issues ago the Spectator protested against the Dinclusion in pictures of so many drinking scenes which had no direct bearing on the stories. Such scenes are beginning to provoke other protests. For instance, the Evening Recorder (Amsterdam, N. Y.), as illuminating a medium of expression of average American sentiment as one could select, has this to say editorially under the heading, "Getting Drink-Minded:" "Are motion picture producers becoming drink-minded? The prevalence of drinking scenes in present-day films appears to indicate that such is the case. A large percentage of the pictures released within the last few months feature drinking scenes. Mickey Mouse and Popeye are about the only film characters who have not been depicted on the screen with a highball in their hand or suffering from the effects of over indulgence in the cup that cheers. Certainly it cannot be argued that drinking scenes are essential to the success of the films. Some of the pictures which are admitted to have returned the largest profits were entirely free from them. Possibly producers will argue that the pictures are made true to life, that people are drinking more, and consequently screen productions, to be an accurate reproduction of the activities of the individuals which they are supposed to depict, must follow the trend of the times. There are many who believe that it would be advisable to places less stress upon accuracy in so far as stage drinking is concerned. The producers have not hesitated to present distorted versions of books from which their plays are adapted. If they can forego accuracy in this respect, why is accuracy so essential in regard to drinking?"

COME pertinent remarks are made by the editor of the J always interesting English publication, Film Weekly: "Over ten years ago, the screen's current 'epic' was put into the programme of the Tivoli cinema in London. It was called Ben-Hur, and it proceeded to write itself a page of screen history by drawing crowds of filmgoers to the Tivoli for eleven months on end. Next week, Ben-Hur will be on show again. It is included in the general releases from Monday onwards. Don't imagine, however, that Ben-Hur has now become nothing more than a mere museum piece-something in which present-day filmgoers will find only a semi-archaeological interest. The comparison between this great picture of ten years ago and our own pictures of today will not rouse a feeling of smug complacency. Admittedly, on the story side the old films seem so incredibly naive, so lacking in the most elementary sense of psychology or characterization,

that it is difficult to believe we once enjoyed them. But one aspect of the best of the old films is as fresh and vital as ever-their action. The galley-scenes and the chariot race in Ben-Hur are still exciting. There is something more in them than mere material for an Eddie Cantor burlesque. When The Birth of a Nation was revived in London some two years ago, the use of close-ups and the 'penetrating psychology' for which D. W. Griffith became famous, seemed utterly dated and meaningless -almost grotesque. But the great race-against-time climax of the Klu Klux Klan was as vividly thrilling as any of the races-against-time that have followed it. Those comparatively crude early films had discovered the necessity for action. That quality still survives in them today. Some of our so-subtle modern screenplays could benefit even now from their example. There is a lesson to be · learnt from Ben-Hur—the lesson that action always has, and always will be the most important factor in screen entertainment."

ONE day recently my activities, both physical and mental, had been a little more strenuous than usual. I was somewhat tired, but I had to attend a preview and make the best of it. The loge seat was comfortable. I fitted into it snugly, and had difficulty in remaining alert enough mentally to catch all the crisp comedy lines the players on the screen tossed back and forth. Two or three times I had to ask Mrs. Spectator what the audience was laughing at. I was in precisely the same position as the tired businessman finds himself after a hard day at the office; he wants to fit comfortably into a film theatre seat and be both amused and rested. He does not desire a brand of entertainment demanding his close attention, something he must bring to himself. He wants it brought to him with no effort on his part. Silent pictures filled the bill for him. Their musical accompaniments soothed his tired brain cells and his eyes brought the entertainment to him. That is why the silent screen built such a big industry in such an astonishingly short time. If film production executives had even half the brains to justify the size of the salaries they draw, they would realize that rest and relaxation are the biggest paying commodities it is possible for them to sell the public, and they would see to it that audible dialogue in their productions was brought as near as possible to the vanishing point. Nothing in the success of the screen as an industry is so amazing as the fact that it continues to be a success in spite of the ignorance which controls it. In the hands of people who understand it, it could earn twice its present profits.

WHAT appeals to me as an example of astute filmtheatre advertising appeared in a recent edition of the Harvard Crimson, the University's daily paper. The picture advertised was The Green Light; the advertisement, that of the University Theatre, bearing the heading: "Hollywood Pre-Viewer Vs. Crimson Movie-Goer," and in parallel columns are extracts from the Spectator's review praising the picture and from the Crimson's condemning it. The advertisement displays the question:

"Here Are Their Opinions-On Which Side Are You?" Such exploitation should attract intelligent film patrons by making them curious to learn for themselves which opinion of the picture's merits agrees with their own. Apparently I came through the test all right. In a letter accompanying a copy of the advertisement, Seth H. Field, assistant manger of the theatre, says: "We are glad to report that a great majority of our patrons praised the film in question and your reputation remains unstained. Box-office receipts were unusually good, too." Mr. Field also reveals the inspiration for the advertisement: "For many years the management of the University Theatre has found your reviews of the new films to be more practical and reliable than those found in any other trade publication. And when a young, inexperienced college critic came along and so violently disagreed with your opinion of Green Light, we just had to make an issue of it."

MUSINGS: Sometimes I wonder if Simone Simon is familiar with the Hetch Hetchy project.... If you like the Spectator, it would be a friendly act on your part so to inform a friend who is not a subscriber.... We have named our little wild duck Herbie as a compliment to Herbert Marshall, Hugh Herbert and Herbert Rawlinson, though it is possible future developments will make the name stand for Herbena. . . . Mrs. Spectator knits me the most admirable socks. Remind me some time to show them to you. . . . Bulbs from the great gladiolus farm of A. H. Nichols at Santa Maria, are coming along amazingly in our garden. . . . We have named the new blonde spaniel puppy Freddie, after Freddie Astaire, Freddie March, Freddie MacMurray, Freddie Datig, and Fredericksburg, Virginia. . . . In London a score of years ago I saw King George and Oueen Mary driving to Westminster in the great golden coach the new king and queen rode in to their coronation, the former chore being the opening of parliament Some day I hope to see a motion picture in which the hero and heroine are shown in each of two scenes with at least three hairs out of place, even though it meant the loss of jobs by the comb-and-brush people who flutter around the sets. . . . In the middle of one of our flower beds there is a flourishing plant which I believe ultimately will bear one or more squashes; how it got there I do not know, but I recognize its right to existence, hence I tend it carefully. . . . Application for squashes will be filed for delivery in order of receipt Out of the mouths of babes, etc. Mrs. Spectator and I were having a difficult time trying to figure out how to assemble the couch-hammock Sears-Roebuck deliverers had deposited in chunks on our back lawn. The face of red-headed, four-year-old Bernard Bown was pressed against the far fence. Jerking his thumb in the direction of another neighbor's house, he piped up, "There's a thing like that over there. Why don't you go over and look at it?" We went, we saw, we came back and conquered. Astonishing boy, Bernard. . . . The sun is shining, birds are singing, a thousand plants in the flower garden are beckoning me to come and tend them if I have hope of enjoying later their color and their perfume. So long!

Guild's Great Power for Good



WISELY used, the power now invested in the Screen Actors Guild can be a big factor in the future of motion pictures. Socially, artistically and commercially it can revolutionize the picture map. It is all a matter of the Guild's keeping its head. So far, it has progressed with discretion under leadership which seems to have been inspired. The leader, I believe, has been Kenneth Thomson; at last, his is the only name I have seen always connected with the Guild in the same capacity, and the papers have told us of his many trips hither and yon for the purpose of fortifying the Guild's battle lines. Certainly the opening campaign was conceived brilliantly and executed ably, and the Guild will be wise in continuing it along the same praisworthy lines.

The capitulation of the producers was but an incident, a preliminary skirmish to clear the way for the main advance. The producers were vulnerable. Their handling of their players was heartless from the social standpoint and unwise from a business standpoint. The abrupt reestablishment of the relative importance of producers and players was the greatest thing which could happen to the business of making pictures. Their loss of prestige was earned by the producers' unwise policy of handling their acting talent. For their own good, for the good of the stockholders in their companies, their complete domination of the destinies of players had to be terminated. The Guild terminated it, and the extent of the boon which will be conferred on both the film industry and its acting personnel will be determined by the degree of wisdom displayed by the Guild in wielding the great power put into its hands.

FOR one thing, the Guild finds itself in a position to remedy an evil of the producers' creation. The army of those seeking work as extras has been permitted to grow to enormous proportions. Artistically and financially the industry would be better off if it were reduced to proportions which would balance supply and demand. Daily Variety tells us there are twelve thousand names which could be removed from the Casting Bureau's rolls without impairment of the source of supply. The greater number of them are names of young men and women who live more on hope of employment than on fruits of labor. They use the fact of the enrollment as an excuse for idleness, claiming their names on the Bureau's list eliminates them from classification among the unemployed. I grew tired of helping one young fellow who had received only one call in almost a year, but protested indignantly when I suggested he should seek a job in some other line. He was a registered extra, he claimed, had a job as such. Taking his name from the extra list and forcing him to seek elsewhere for employment would be the kindest thing which could be done for him and for other thousands similarly situated.

Another aspect of the social situation is the industry's brutal indifference to the fate of those who played such a valuable part in building the foundation upon which the financial structure of motion pictures now rests. Only

yesterday I stopped in front of a four-room cottage in San Fernando Valley and shouted greetings to a prematurely old man who was hoeing his vegetable garden. For nearly a decade prior to seven or eight years ago, the man's name on a marquee caused more people to pass under it; he never gave a poor performance on the screen, always lived a sober, quiet life; built on a fashionable street a modest home for himself and his with He had a right to assume his position was assured; was serving his profession ably and loyally, was giving full value for what he received.

ODAY this fine actor is eating the last dollars received from the sale of his home and its rich furnishing: The future he gazes into is an empty void. Occasionally he gets extra work, perhaps half a dozen days a year. You can multiply him by some hundreds before you complete the true picture of Hollywood. And it is up to the Guild to repaint the picture, to do something to add a future to the present of its members. It can be done by putting up a bar to future importations. Call it anything you will—restraint of trade, restricting artistic expression, putting a curb on acting genius, depriving the public of fresh talent-but through it all there stands out clearly the fact that the Guild members would be the most consummate asses alive if they did not take advantage of their power to make the future as comforting as a prospect as the present is as a fact.

I read somewhere that doing something about the neglected players was on the list of things to be taken up by the Guild. The first step should be the dignifying of extra work by making it available to the smallest number consistent with the demands of production. The more dignified it becomes the less humiliating it will be to the old-time big players who accept it. It should not be thrown to them as we throw bones to dogs. About the only thing the actor I mention above has left is his pride. For heaven's sake, let him keep that! I talked about him with a big producer whom he had served faithfully for years. "He should have saved money when he was making it," was all the satisfaction I got. I told him I thought it would be wise for him to develop human instincts for his own use before he endeavored to change the nature of others. Our neglected players know they should have saved their money, but that knowledge does not put food in their cupboards now.

WHATEVER pressure the Guild applies to producers to assure a safe future for its members, can have only a beneficial effect on film theatre box-offices. Of all the insane ideas of producers the one which stands out most prominently is that the public continually is craving new faces. Hollywood has aped the stage in everything except those things it would be wise for it to ape; it has been influenced by everything except the wisdom the stage could teach it. One thing the stage learned decades ago was that the public liked stock companies, liked to see a favorite player this week as the romantic lead and

next week as the butler. That fact the screen industry's mental giants have ignored. They think the sound device has revolutionized human nature, that it has changed the public from a desire to be entertained by its friends, to a great yearning to be entertained by strangers. They cry out for new faces because they can think of no other excuse for their difficulty in maintaining the strength of the box-office.

The greatest boon which can be conferred upon the producing organization is the reduction of the number of players to the absolute minimum necessary for the filling of casts. Lacking the ability to figure out for themselves why the public does not desire new faces, producers should be forced to employ only old faces, replenishing the supply from the bottom as death or inclination reduces it at the top. The restricted extra enrollment should be today's training ground for tomorrow's star material. Such a policy governing Guild activities would redound greatly to the film industry's financial benefit. Screen entertainment would become more intimate; with fewer candidates for the friendship of the public, closer friendship would be established.

ONE thought must be kept uppermost in the mind of Guild officials when treating with producers: There is not a player in the business whom a producer would not throw overboard ruthlessly the moment he thought the player could be of no further use to him. The whole history of production proves that, the pitiful array of neglected talent bears witness to it. Rarely does a player slump by virtue of his own failings. He is at the mercy of producer, writer and director—two or three appearances in bad pictures over which he has no control, and his sun has set. The practice has become a fixed feature of picture procedure and the Guild's steps to alter it will have to be drastic and without regard for the feeling of producers who never have displayed any feeling for those in their employ.

One of the finest chapters in American industrial history was written when the famous stars of motion pictures threatened to go out on strike unless the less famous of their fellow-players were given a fair deal by their employers. It was a splendid thing to do—and a splendid thing for the film industry, as it ultimately will discover. Take the one item of reduction in the extra registration. It would be interesting to know how much it costs producing companies now to cover shooting delays resulting from the employment of half-trained extras. It

would run into a huge sum. With the available supply so limited and shooting schedules so arranged that most of the recognized extras would be employed most of the time, producers would have at their command a well trained army which could snap into scenes in a fraction of the time now required to obtain good results. And—still more important—the entertanment quality of the production would be improved, for as time went on the extra ranks would be composed solely of expert players.

THERE is one thing the Guild should put a stop to instantly: the insult to the decent women and girls of the screen who are asked to work in pictures with young women whose presence on the sets is due solely to the fact of their having been shameless enough to undress before audiences. If producers cannot be decent for the sake of decency itself, then it is up to the Guild to force decency upon them.

In the exercise of their newly acquired power, the Guild must not overlook the importance of its obligations to the film industry as a whole. Players are but part of the producers' business and their financial security cannot be more assured than that of the entire industry. In short, it must see that the producers get a square deal from the players. One evil the Guild should tackle without delay is that of the agency racket. In a previous SPECTATOR (December 19, 1936) I related the case of Errol Flynn. He had been receiving a salary of \$125 a week up to the time of his appearance in Captain Blood. He showed so much promise in that picture that Jack Warner voluntarily raised his salary in one jump to one thousand dollars per week. Flynn was satisfied completely until Myron Selznick told him he was not getting enough and persuaded him to strike for more, notwithstanding the existence of his contract with Warner Brothers. In the middle of the shooting of Another Dawn, Flynn refused to work until his salary was raised again. Selznick engineered the whole thing, turning a contented player virtually into a hold-up man. It would have cost Warners scores of thousands of dollars to replace Flynn in Another Dawn. Capitulation was the only way out, and the Flynn salary was fixed at \$2500 a week in order to permit shooting to continue.

That is one example of agency racketeering it is up to the Guild to put a stop to. It should see that an actor's signature on a contract means something. And it should see that only ethical agents are allowed to operate in Hollywood.

Sound in Relation to Other Elements



UNEASINESS of bankers and the big film producers over the financial future of pictures, gradually is coming into the open, is being mentioned in interviews appearing in the papers. Anyone with an ounce of brains knows that spending more on production and charging more to the public will serve only to hasten the financial crisis the industry must face. Producers cannot buy their way out of the impending difficulties. They will have to think their way out. In business there is no substitute for brains. If the screen were run by people who

could think in its terms, production costs could be reduced, admission prices lowered and the film industry would be more prosperous than it ever has been. The present bar to the industry's progress toward stability is an interesting study in psychology. Those who dictate picture policies assume a superior attitude to cloak an inferiority complex—they would like to acquire at least a little comprehension of the fundamentals of screen entertainment, but they shrink from betraying their need for it by the fact of their efforts to learn it; they know

a revolution in production methods is inevitable, but they realize its undertaking would be a confession of their responsibility for its necessity. It is an interesting situation. Maintaining a nice balance on the pedestals to which the sycophancy of their underlings has elevated them, is their chief concern.

ALL the troubles rushing on the film industry are due to the manner of its use of the sound device. Instead of the greater glories it could have conferred on screen entertainment, sound is piling up its difficulties. It has changed the nature of the medium from one with which the audience formerly entertained itself, to one which must do the entertaining. It made the screen a factual medium, one which has sacrificed screen art to the Yacht Club Boys, swing orchestras, dance ensembles, spectacles. For a time such features gave audiences satisfaction, but each in turn finally must exhaust its ability to entertain. So far, producers have been lucky enough to find new attractions to plug the holes made by the waning popularity of the acts which flared into sudden successes, but the supply is running out and the box-office is demonstrating the necessity for new material. From my seat on the sidelines it appears the only way out for the film industry is to return to its original business of making motion pictures and give the sound device the place to which it should have been assigned from its inception. It never should have been permitted to become a substitute for anything which had established its right to recognition as one of the fundamental elements of screen art. And the greatest of all the elements, the one which set screen art apart from all other arts, which gave it in a twinkling of time's eye a world-wide popularity which no other medium of entertainment even approached, was silence.

OUND, however, always had been an element of screen entertainment. It was only by the complete functioning of our imaginations that a motion picture meant anything to us. If our imaginations accepted a moving shadow as a real fire engine dashing down a real street, they also made real the sound of the engine's siren. Its enforced silence was not a weakness of the screen, therefore the microphone, merely as something which enabled it to make sounds, was not demanded by anything the medium lacked. But the lack of demand did not mean, that, having it, there was any reason why it should not be put to use. Obvious to everyone except those who make pictures was the fact that the microphone made it possible for each film to be provided with a full musical score at its source. Beyond that it could have been used to give silence more significance. (I develop this point further in an article to appear in a later Spec-TATOR as one of the series on screen fundamentals now running.) Instead of giving the microphone merely a part to play in screen productions, Hollywood-it really should be called Follywood—handed over the entire medium to it; instead of restricting it to expressing itself, it was assigned the task of expressing everything the screen offered. The result is the desperation of the producers in their search for novelities to take the place of what their use of sound has taken away from pictures.

NE would think the simplest method for producers to adopt would be to relegate sound to its legitimate use as an aid in the chart-room of the cinematic ship instead of retaining it as something in the hold which ultimately must scuttle the ship. Of all the contentions which producers advance to defend their use of sound, by far the most ludicrous is that it adds a touch of reality to a screen creation. Whoever charged the screen with lacking the quality of reality? It was the realest form of entertainment ever presented to the public until the degree of its reality was lessened by the injection of real sounds. Our imaginations made real everything the screen offered. Do you suppose any of us ever sighed over a photograph of a boy making love to the photograph of a girl, or cried over a photograph of a mother grieving over a photograph of her baby? If we did not imagine what we were viewing was real, such scenes could mean nothing whatever to us. But now we must hear the avowal of love and the sobs of the mother, "touches of reality" which make it harder to accept the rest of the composition as real. Only by the complete harmony of all its elements can any art creation be worthy of its art.

Sound came to the screen merely as an added elescreen art. It could have become a great help, but producer ignorance has made of it a great hindrance. As an element, it has been handled brilliantly by the technicans who have developed it until it can reproduce a whisper as handily as it can a shout. But the same degree of brilliance has not been displayed in the application of sound to screen creations. Too much effort has been expended in the endeavor to achieve realism, to translate sounds literally for reproduction in film theatres. Such translations should be in terms of the medium which is going to express them. For instance, if we were translating a story written in French for publication in English and came to the French salutation, "Comment vous portez-vous aujourd' hui?" we would not translate it literally, "How you carry you today?" We would express it in idiomatic English—"How are you today?" The same principle should be followed in translating sounds for the screen. The trouble with stage actors and playwrights as well as composers of music, is their reluctance to make concessions to the new art when engaged to express themselves in it. They strive to carry the old arts with them into the new.

ONE day recently while driving I caught on my car radio part of a broadcast by an orchestra conductor. As I missed the beginning of the broadcast and arrived at my destination before it had concluded, I do not know who the speaker was, but he impressed me as being competent to discuss music. He said both radio and the screen had not succeeded yet in perfecting the recording of music for projection with all its values intact, but there still was hope of both ultimately giving us music which would sound exactly as we would hear it if we were present when it was recorded. I do not see that the world will lose anything if such mechanical perfection should not be attained. It is up to composers to meet

the machine half way, to compose for it, to take into account its peculiarities, to yield to its demands. What matters to a picture audience is how the music sounds in the film theatre, not how it sounds at its source. The microphone has its peculiarities. It is not true to brasses and double basses; it does full justice to bassoons, clarinettes and other wind instruments, but is not always able to do justice to violins. There are some voices it does not like, and scarcely ever does it give a sympathetic ear to large choruses.

JUST as musicians, when composing, should take into account the importance of meeting the demands of the microphone, so should producers of motion pictures strive to understand the part it can play in screen entertainment. The first thing to be learned is that its mission is not to bring anything to the screen which the audience can supply with its imagination. The motion picture's

popularity was due in the first place to what might be epitomized as its ability to make us believe we were looking at a real steam whistle in operation and allowing our imaginations to provide the sound. It would be interesting to know by what process of reasoning picture producers arrive at the conclusion that the actual sound of the whistle adds anything to the scene. It is just noise, and it is noise which is driving the public away from film theatres. Producers probably would claim that as the microphone is able to make a noise; there is no reason why it should not make it. I am quite able to journey out to Santa Monica and jump off the end of the pier, but I do not see that the fact of my being able makes it obligatory for me to do it. The sound device presented producers with opportunities to emphasize story points, to make dramatic moments more gripping, but its present full-toned use makes it a burden the film industry is finding it difficult to bear.

How to Present Dialogue Intelligently



(The seventh of a series of special articles by the Editor on film fundamentals.)

THE American screen today reveals their imitative faculty to be the one which picture producers exercise most consistently. In the previous SPECTATOR I related the instance of the first skating picture having started most of the producers making pictures containing skating sequences. Hollywood's belief in cycles to a certain extent has a sound psychological foundation to rest upon. The Sonja Henie picture pleases audiences which see it; pleasure is associated with skating; skating in another picture suggests agreeable entertainment; and apparently a succession of skating pictures forms a cycle. But the mistake producers make is their believing that the desire for skating pictures originates with the public and that even the first skating picture is made to meet a demand which previously had sprouted suddenly in the public mind.

This cycle complex springs from the same root from which comes other weaknesses retarding the development of the art of the screen, with a corresponding injurious effect upon the business of the screen. The root of practically all the present troubles is the possession by picture producers of highly developed inferiority complexes. Even while they are paying high salaries to publicity men to tell the world how good they are, they have to admit to themselves their lack of knowledge of the screen as an art, their ignorance of the fundamental appeal which has given it its strength as a medium of entertainment, and the principles which should govern the creation of a motion picture. That they know they cannot recognize cinematic values is demonstrated by the volume of their purchase of books and plays as story material for their productions. If those who control the industry understood the art, the best writers in the world would be writing original stories for motion pictures. But more on that point when we reach it in a later discussion.

UR present search is for the straight talkie's place on the screen entertainment program, a search we embarked upon in the fifth article of this series, followed through the sixth without reaching our objective and now are in the seventh with the objective not yet in sight. But on our way we have picked up much of value to our understanding of the whole situation. We must not forget the screen is a business of selling an art, and if we are to decide what is good for the art, we must be governed by considerations for the good of the business. We have argued previously that as it was the public's patronage of silent pictures more as a matter of habit than through critical choice among the attractions offered it, which was responsible for the initial prosperity of the film industry, the new element of sound should have been applied to screen creations in a manner that would have kept intact the elements which gained the screen its first popularity.

Audible dialogue fouls the purity of screen art, but its judicious use as a factor in expediting production makes its business significance too important to be sacrificed to our meticulous demands for pure cinema. But making the camera the story-telling medium and making audible only such speeches as in silent days appeared on the screen as printed titles, are practical concessions to the art which could have only beneficial effect on the business by getting people back into the habit of attending picture houses more often than they do at present.

B UT if we carry the recognition of the art up to this point, we will be denying ourselves such a joyous treat as My Man Godfrey, the intellectual stimulant of Romeo and Juliet, the delightfully diverting philosophy of Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, three outstanding examples of screen entertainment made successful because of their dialogue, not in spite of it. If we had cut the dialogue down to its possible minimum and used the camera to cover the

eliminations, we would have denied ourselves the delightful nonsense of *Godfrey*, the exquisite poetry of *Romeo* and the homely speeches of *Mr. Deeds*. So it would appear we must have talkies as part of our cinematic program—pictures which tell their stories almost entirely with the microphone.

Nothing I have written so far in this series of discussions, or in anything else I have written, has been to the effect that I do not like talkies. I do like them—like them very much—and am quite content to see one every evening. Yesterday I saw three, one in the morning, another in the afternoon, the third at evening. One day I saw five. But it is my business to see pictures. I view them as something to study, not as a relaxing agency to rest me after a hard day's work. Almost every talkie one sees has some merit, and some of them are brilliant examples of the union of the camera and the microphone. I would not carry my obsession for the purity of screen art to the point of denying the public the enjoyment it can derive from an engaging story told intelligently in the talkie form.

LET us go back a little. The greatest, most valuable asset the film industry can acquire is the revival of the public's habit of attending film theatres. The technique which esablished the habit in the silent days would restore it now, would provide a form of entertainment which the public would find so relaxing its attendance would become more regular than the continuance of alltalkie programs could make it. If the producing organizations would begin again to make motion pictures the attendance habit would be restored. Then the chief concern of the industry would be the preservation of the habit, to guard aginst a repetition of its cessation. To put it in another way: The concern of the industry would be to determine the saturation point of all-talkies with regard to the safety of the habit, then to make just sufficient talkies to reach the point and not go beyond it.

After seeing a succession of motion pictures, an audience would be delighted with a change of diet in the way of a Call It a Day with its fun, or Lost Horizon with its intellectual and visual appeal. Such attractions sprinkled through the flow of screen entertainment would not break the habit responsible for the film industry's financial welfare. It, too, would enable producers to avail themselves of story material whose values can be developed by the microphone to better advantage than by the camera. But if producers are to make just the number of talkies to form the right mixture with motion pictures, they should display a better understanding of the talkie form than they have displayed thus far in the history of the sound screen.

HE inferiority complex which leads producers into imitating one another instead of breaking new trails, influences also their purchases of story material. They are afraid to trust their own convictions, afraid to rely upon their own judgement of cinematic values of an original story. If a play about a hitch-hiking heiress is produced in New York, a film producer will purchase it and make

it into a picture. If the picture is a success, film producers will credit the public mind with veering suddenly to hitch-hiking heiresses—with starting a new cycle—and it would be possible then to sell them an original story about a hitch-hiking heiress. That the success of the play was in no way due to the fact of its being about an heiress with itching feet, that it prospered solely because of the dramatic power with which the episodes in the girl's life were presented, plus the brilliancy of the lines and the excellence of the performances, lies in the depths beyond the probing limits of the producers' minds.

However, it is not my purpose here to quarrel with the system of story selection or to criticize producers for their failure to establish their own literature; those are subjects we will come to later, but new let us consider how the makers of screen entertainment handle their talkie material after they get it.

The one thing the sudden growth, the worldwide popularity, of the silent picture established, was that screen art was as soundly marketable as iron or wheat—was as stable an article of commerce as any a businessman could hope to trade in.

We already have established the number of talkies the market will absorb without getting indigestion; we wish to decide how they should be made.

The picture producer firmly believes and solemnly will tell you the public demands talk in its film entertainment. Being honest in holding such veiws, it is understandable that in going over from motion pictures to talkies he was indifferent as to the amount of picture technique he brought with him. The present talkie is little more than photographed dialogue, and so far have the principles of screen art been left behind, their influence is not permitted to play even a minor role in the talkie form. A simple rule for any kind of screen creation, either a motion picture or a talkie, should be that nothing which can be demonstrated visually should be expressed in audible words. But close adherence to such role would deny the public the esthetic pleasure which language, as such, can give us. There is worded beauty in some passages in the Bible and tomorrow there will be a new wisecrack to make us laugh. Why should we be denied them merely because we have to take liberties with an art to obtain them?

BUT rarely does the screen today attempt to please us with the high art possible for spoken literature to attain. We are surfeited with the censored imprecations of gangsters, the standardized utterances of screen shadows in love, the "dese," and "dems" and "doses" of people who talk that way, and in almost every instance you will find the story overloaded with such talk is one which would have made more impressive entertainment

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if it had been written for the camera instead of for the microphone.

The trouble with the screen today is that it is thinking in terms of talk, but not in terms of what it says.

The talk which is included as an integral element of a screen creation does not have to be standardized. Let us consider some pictures, one, My Man Godfrey, already referred to. What speech in it can you remember? I can remember none, and I saw it three times. It was so delightfully nonsensical, so downright crazy, its mood so admirably sustained by the brilliant direction of Gregory La Cava and the clever performances of Carole Lombard, William Powell and other members of the cast, that what the characters said was merely an articulated part of an amusing scene. We remember the whole scene but cannot recall the lines which were a part of it. That is one legitimate use of audible dialogue in a screen production—its use more as sound effect than as something entertaining by virtue of the manner in which it is worded.

KEMBRANDT, an English picture produced and directed by Alexander Korda, talented European whose ability was not recognized when he was tring to gain a foothold in Hollywood production circles, provides an illumiating illustration of the legitimate use of dialogue for the sake of its literary beauty and as an element in characterizing a player. Charles Laughton, playing Rembrandt van Rijn, delivers a speech of two hundred and nine words, containing story value which he could have expressed in three: "I love Saskia." But such a brief statement would not have matched the mood of the scene or given full expression to the feelings stirring him. In a low tone, speaking more to himself than to the gay throng surrounding him, Rembrandt pays a beautiful tribute to Saskia, his wife, crediting her with the combined virtues of all women:

"A creature, half-child, half-woman, half-angel, halflover, brushed against him, and of sudden he knew that when one woman gives herself to you, you possess all women-women of every age and race and kind-and, more than that, the moon, the stars, all miracles and legends are yours; the brown-skinned girls who inflame your senses with their play; the cool, yellow-haired women who entice and escape you; the gentle ones who serve you; the slender ones who torment you; the mothers who bore and suckled you-all women whom God created out of the teeming fullness of the earth are yours in the love of one woman. Throw a purple mantle lightly over her shoulders, and she becomes a Queen of Sheba, lay your tousled head blindly upon her breast, and she is a Delilah waiting to enthrall you. Take her garments from her, strip the last veil from her body, and she is a chaste Susanne covering her nakedness with fluttering hands. Gaze upon her as you would gaze upon a thousand strange women, but never call her yours-for her secrets are inexhaustible; you will never know them all. Call her by one name only; I call her Saskia." (The Rembrandt dialogue was written by Lojos Biro and Arthur Winteris.)

SUSTAINED speech by Gary Cooper in Mr. Deeds A Goes to Town has definite story value, and its length is justified by the homespun philosophy written into it by Robert Riskin and the intelligent reading given it by Cooper. Defending himself in court when his sanity is questioned, one of the accounts against him being his playing of the tuba under circumstances which his accusers claim point to his lack of mental balance, Mr. Deeds speaks: "About my playing the tuba— seems like a lot of fuss has been made about that. If a man's crazy just 'cause he plays the tuba, somebody better look into it, 'cause there are a lot of tuba players running around loose. Of course, I don't see any harm in it. I play mine whenever I want to concentrate. That may sound funny to some people, but most everybody does something silly when they're thinking. For instance, the Judge here is an O-filler... You fill in all the spaces in the O's with your pencil. I was watching you. That may make you look a little crazy, Your Honor, just sitting around filling in O's, but I don't see anything wrong. 'Cause that helps you think. Other people are doodlers... That's a name we made up back home for people who make foolish designs on paper while they're thinking. It's called doodling. Most everybody is a doodler. Did you ever see a scratch pad in a telephone booth? People draw the most idiotic pictures when they're thinking. Dr. Fraser here would probably think up a long name for it, 'cause he doodles all the time. If Dr. Fraser had to doodle to help him think, that's his business—everybody does something different. Some people are . . earpullers, some are nail-biters. That man there—Mr. Semple—is a nose twitcher. The lady with him is a knuckle-cracker. So you see, Your Honor, everybody does funny things to help them think. Well, I play the tuba."

NOT often even in a stage play composed entirely of speeches, and still more rarely in a talking picture, is one unbroken speech of such length written for a player. Subjecting audiences to the necessity of sustained listening for such a long period is not good craftsmanship. Both on the stage and in pictures the device usually resorted to to elicit essential facts of a witness's testimony in the trial of a case, is a question-and-answer exchange between counsel and witness. Such device could have been employed in Mr. Deeds. It was available to both Riskin, writer of the screen play, and Frank Capra, director of the picture. For his masterly cinematic interpretation of the story material in this production, Capra received from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the award for the best direction of 1936. A big factor in his selection no doubt was the manner in which he handled the scene in which Cooper makes his long spech.

Capra presents the speech with a relieving accompaniment of pertinent action. When Cooper charges the judge with being a doodler, there is a burst of laughter by the audience, stimulated into increased volume an instant later by the reaction of the surprised judge. And so it goes throughout the entire speech. Even though

it is not interrupted by another voice, it is not a speech which demands sustained listening by the audience. Laughter bubbles up along its entire course. In essence a man defending himself against an accusation of mental incompetency, presents a spectacle lacking in all suggestion of mirthprovoking elements. But here the audience is not laughing at Mr. Deeds; it is laughing with him as he neatly turns the tables on his accusers, who, as the audience is aware, are endeavoring to get control of his fortune.

ANOTHER legitimate use of audible dialogue is demonstrated in The Devil Is a Sissy, directed by W. S. Van Dyke; the story by Rowland Brown and the screen play by John Lee Mahin and Richard Schayer. It really is a moral preachment aimed at boys, but so well presented it was received with satisfaction by adult audiences. Although the titles of the majority of pictures are catch-phrases bearing little relation to anything in the stories, in this case the title has significance. It is a provocative title. What does it mean? is a question one who views the picture would ask. No creation of any art should suggest a question it does not answer if it is to preserve the perfect unity, the completeness within itself, all creations must possess to be worthy examples of their arts. The title of The Devil Is a Sissy prompts a question and its dialogue answers it.

The judge of the juvenile court, played with understanding and sympathy by Jonathan Hale, has an informal and friendly chat with three boys brought before him on charge of having stolen some toys. As part of the intimate scene, we hear the judge: "That's what makes a fellow tough—to be able to take it. You wouldn't want anybody to call you a little devil, would you? That's what they say about bad little sissies who act naughty when they can't have their own way... By the way, the devil's a weak sister. You know that, don't you? Because he was an angel once . . . and an angel has to be tough to do his job, and the devil couldn't be tough enough so they threw him out—and he's been hiding down below ever since. You know, I think the devil is a sissy."

FROM this speech by the judge we learn the title is the text of the sermon the whole picture preaches. It is another legitimate use of dialogue and as it is presented in an easy, conversational manner, it is assimilated by the audience without intellectual effort. Laughton's speech has emotional appeal and Cooper's appeals principally to that sense which provides us with the utmost relaxation—our sense of humor.

One cannot quarrel with the film industry for offering for sale pictures demanding purely intellectual digestion, which expound philosophical and psychological problems. There is a market for them, but it is an extremely limited one as compared with that for emotional entertainment. It so happens that the vast majority of stories the industry has filmed since the screen became articulate, would have provided more satisfactory entertainment and commanded a wider market if they had been entrusted to

the camera instead of to the microphone for their interpretation.

That will be the text of the article which will appear in the next Spectator.

Some Late Previews

Love At First Fright

WINGS OVER HONOLULU, Universal picture and release. E. M. Asher, associate producer; directed by H. C. Potter; screen play by Isabel Dawn and Boyce DeGaw; from story by Mildred Cram; photographed by Joseph Valentine; art direction by Jack Otterson; Maurice Wright, film editor; musical direction by Charles Previn; special effects by John P. Fulton; Frank Shaw, assistant director. Cast: Wendy Barrie, Ray Milland, Kent Taylor, William Gargan, Polly Rowles, Mary Philips, Samuel S. Hinds, Margaret McWade, Clara Blandick, Joyce Compton and Louise Beavers. Running time, 80 minutes.

WENDY BARRIE has one glimpse of Ray Milland and goes rigid. I thought she was scared stiff; she looked it, and I still think she was, for it must be frightening to fall in love so suddenly and so violently—some new manifestation of emotional internal combustion. But Milland is not so hasty; none of that sudden impulse stuff for him! It must have been a full hour after seeing the girl for the first time that he asked her to marry him; and so deep was Wendy's love that another hour or so elapsed after her acceptance before she remembered the detail of asking him what his name was.

Now, H. C. Potter is an intelligent director. He revealed as much in his first picture, Beloved Enemy, for Sam Goldwyn. And possibly two people could fall in love as suddenly as these two do-perhaps many have. But what people have done in real life is not always legitimate screen material. I know a man who once was worried greatly because of a lack of a specific sum of money which he had to have to get himself out of a difficulty. On the sidewalk in front of the building in which he had his office, he found the exact sum of money in a dirty envelope, advertised it, no one claimed it, he got out of his difficulty. You do not believe it, and I would not believe it if it were part of a screen story. Yet it actually happened. So people might have fallen in love as explosively as the two do in Wings Over Honolulu, but that does not make it legitimate screen material, which should be composed, not of what has happened, but what an audience will believe could happen.

The story is one presenting the difficulties confronting a bride who marries a naval officer. It shows she has to compete with the service itself in her efforts to hold her husband's love. The theme makes it necessary to get the wedding out of the way as soon as possible, but the story treatment gives the picture a false start by the suddenness of the romance. It would have been easy to have made Milland an old friend arriving unexpectedly at Wendy's party, and their boy-and-girl affection suddenly flaring into true love. The theme then would have been strengthened by being a presentation of the navy's effect on a love which had endured from childhood, but which almost collapsed under pressure of naval routine. As we

have the romance, it is so sudden its collapse is only what we might expect. But even that is not the main story weakness. What harms the picture most is the narrowness of the story's application. It has direct appeal only to naval officers and girls who marry them.

When those of us who are not in the navy either by Annapolis or marriage, visit a film theatre, we wish to see stories about us, presenting things which could happen to us. My wife knows that to hold my love she possibly might have to compete with a blonde, but never with a battleship, consequently she has no direct interest in anything which could happen only to the wife of a naval officer. What story it has, Universal presents handsomely and Potter directs capably, but it is a picture with restricted appeal and little prospect of general acclaim. Visually it is a beautiful thing, thanks to the camera skill of Joseph Valentine and the capable art direction of Jack Otterson. It presents us with Polly Rowles, a newcomer. She is a girl who will bear watching. She strikes me as having just about everything the screen demands. She is going to become a great favorite.

Warners Present Linemen

SLIM, Warners production and release. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Sam Bischoff; directed by Ray Enright; screen play by William Wister Haines, from his novel, SLIM; assistant director, Leeman Katz; special photographic effects, Byron Haskins; film editor, Owen Marks: art director, Ted Smith; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; photographed by Sid Hickox. Cast: Pat O'Brien, Henry Fonda, Margaret Lindsay, Stuart Erwin, J. Farrell MacDonald, Dick Purcell, Joseph Sawyer, Craig Reynolds, John Litel, Jane Wyman, Harlan Tucker, Joseph King, Carlyle Moore, Jr., James Robbins, Henry Otho, Dick Wessell, Max Wagner, Ben Hendricks, Alonzo Price, Maidel Turner, Walter Miller. Running time, 85 minutes.

STRANGELY enough, the picture I saw next after viewing Wings Over Honolulu, was a Warner Brothers production with much the same story, and to which I can point to support my argument that the restricted naval-officer circle is a poor locale for a talkie looking for the patronage of the public at large. In Slim we have two loyal friends in the persons of Pat O'Brien and Henry Fonda; and a nurse (Margaret Lindsay) whom both of them love. As in Wings Over Honolulu the story has to compete with the navy to hold our attention, so in Slim the story has to compete with an industry. O'Brien and Fonda are linemen engaged in stringing high-tension wires.

My objection to the Universal story was that as it concerned only life in the navy, it was too limited in its application, that any moral it taught could concern only naval officers and their wives. One might argue that a linemen story likewise would concern only linemen, therefore have but limited application. But such is not the case. Stringing wires is the daily occupation in a trade not as highly specialized as service as a naval officer, and differing only in its physical operations from hundreds of other trades. The Slim story, consequently, has none of the weaknesses of the navy story. The incidents which compose it could happen in any trade or profession, which makes it easy to project ourselves into it. As things peculiar only to the navy almost wrecks a romance in the Universal story, so do things common to

almost any other line of endeavor almost wreck the romance in Slim.

HE wider application of the Warner picture will make it appeal to a larger audience. There is not a great deal to the story, but there is enough of it to hold together its various physical elements and make it excellent entertainment. It demonstrates again the screen's power to put us in intimate contact with a daily occupation of a little group of men about whom we could learn so graphically in no other way, even though we depend upon them for the continued service of the various electric devices which figure in the smooth operation of our homes. To that extent the picture is educational, widening the scope of our knowledge of things it is interesting to know even though we have no intention of putting the knowledge to practical use. Certainly after viewing the chances linemen take and the hardships they encounter, I have no regrets that I merely write lines and do not hang them on steel towers.

Sam Bischoff, producer, and the Warner technical staff which had to do with the physical features of the production, are to be commended for having done a worthy job. The film editing of Owen Marks is a big factor in the smooth results obtained. He put the film together in a manner which makes us tremble for the safety of Pat O'Brien, Henry Fonda and others atop the great steel towers, even though we are aware the danger of their high perching is a creation of the camera and cutting, that the principals never were in peril.

KAY Enright's direction is of that discerning quality which creates the impression the story is telling itself. He does not offer us a collection of actors playing parts. Instead, he gives us a group of linemen going about their jobs, intent upon getting them done and without regard for the fact that we are watching them. Such direction results only in flawless, authentic performances which convey conviction and hold our close attention. Physically it is a robust production dealing with the labors of strong and agile men, but it has none of the loud dialogue which make so many of such pictures irritating to listen to. Gene Lewis, director of dialogue, saw to it that the players were so proficient in their reading of lines that they lost none of their cleverness in yielding to Enright's apparent insistence on dialogue in natural conversational tones which matched the moods of the various scenes.

The cast does excellent work. Pat O'Brien plays with quiet force which can be developed only by intelligent grasp of the significance of a role. Obviously he is much in love with Margaret Lindsay, but when she expresses her preference for his friend, only his eyes and a few softly spoken words of well-wishes for the two, reveal to us the depth of his emotions. Margaret is one of my favorite young players. Her work always is sincere. She moves quietly through this picture, indulges in no heroics, has no dramatic scenes, but still is a big factor in the satisfaction it will give audiences. Henry Fonda proves to be ideal casting in the name part. He gives us the impression that no one else could have played Slim, a

farm boy who becomes a lineman. Stu Erwin is excellent in a comedy part, which, however, as written narrowly escapes becoming a nuisance by virtue of having so many lines without story value. Joseph King, always sincere and impressive, and J. Farrell MacDonald, a screen stalwart with a host of film friends, also are among those to be credited with excellent performances. MacDonald is not seen often enough. There is no cast to which he cannot add strength.

Is Psychologically Unsound

THEY GAVE HIM A GUN, Metro production and release. Stars Spencer Tracy, Gladys George and Franchot Tone. Harry Rapf, associate producer; screen play by Cyril Hume, Richard Maibaum and Maurice Rapf; from book by William Joyce Cowen; directed by W. S. Van Dyke II; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Harry McAfee and Edwin B. Willis; photographed by Harold Rosson; montage effects by Slavo Vorkapich; film editor, Ben Lewis. Supporting cast: Edgar Dearing, Mary Lou Treen, Cliff Edwards, Charles Trowbridge, Horace MacMahon, Tony Beard, Joe Sawyer, George Chandler, Gavin Gordon, Ernest Whitman, Nita Pike, Joan Woodbury. Running time, 97 minutes.

TRUE, they gave him a gun and taught him how to use it in line with the purpose for which it was given him; but the picture would have us believe the World War taught the young man to be a murderous gangster, that it developed in him criminal tendencies which never would have come to light if there had been no war. We are supposed to side with the author's view of it and extend our sympathy to a young beast not entitled to any. MGM has given the picture one of its usual graphic and visually appealing productions—has made an honest effort to give full value for the price of admission—but as screen entertainment, They Gave Him a Gun lacks the ring of sincerity which spells box-office success. Director Van Dyke presents the story in a matter-of-fact way, a sort of honest, plodding job without either flashes of genius or blemished spots.

The story lacks psychological soundness in that it tries to make us accept a premise which is without merit—that a hitherto blameless character became a murderer solely because of his having become profficient in the use of fire arms during the war. What about the millions of others who received the same training in all the armies and went back to their jobs as peaceful citizens after the war? The story weakness does not lie in the fact of Franchot Tone's having become a gangster when he returned home; it is the story's maudlin attempt to justify him by advancing his army training as a legitimate excuse for his crimes.

THE romance is equally unbelievable. Gladys George, whose careful make-up and meticulous hair-dress even a World War could not disturb, loves Spencer Tracy; he is reported as having been killed in action; because she is too listless thereafter to care what happens, she marries Tone; Tracy comes back, but she sticks to Tone even while he is serving a term in the penitentiary, the revelation of his criminal record reducing none of the fervor of her loyalty to a man she does not love. Had the part been played by a girl of the unsophisticated type who had been taught from childhood that marriage ties are sacred, we might have caught her point of view

and attributed her steadfastness to a mistaken inborn sense of loyalty.

But Gladys George is not that type. We see her as a woman of the world, who knows her way around. Mistress of the techinque of stage acting and revealing little of the personality screen acting demands, she gives a coldly competent performance which has intellectual appeal but leaves our sympathies untouched. The value of a screen characterization is measured in terms of our emotional reaction to it. Here we have a romance too mechanically contrived to stir our emotions, Miss George's contribution to it being without sentimental appeal. Tracy, seemingly incapable of giving a poor performance, is warmly human in all phases of his characterization, which is a masterpiece of intelligent repression and quiet forcefulness. Mary Lou Treen impresses me more with each performance.

W HEN the picture started I thought that here, at last, was to be the anti-war preachment the world is waiting for. A speech by Tone declaring his willingness to be a good citizen at home and his objection to killing in war men who had done nothing to him, evoked the only burst of sincere applause accorded the film by the large invited audience present at the preview. But it turned out to be just a gangster picture with a war background. That leaves the anti-war film still to be made, one which the entire world would receive with the utmost enthusiasm, one which could do more towards putting an end to the insanity of war than could be accomplished in any other way. But Hollywood producers lack the nerve to make it. They are afraid Mr. Hitler would not like it and exhibitors in Ethiopia might not show it. A well made picture of the sort would make so much money in the United States alone that its producer could tell the foreign market to go hang.

They Gave Him a Gun has plenty of war in it and the Metro technical geniuses have made the sequencs impressively war-like. The camera craftsmanship of Slavko Vorkapich, an artist in composing dramatic scenes, is responsible for stirring montage effects. By way of variety, we are taken into New York streets and a penitentiary, and then visit the grounds occupied for the moment by an itinerant carnival company. But the sum total of the whole film effort is a rather cold and unconvincing mixture of war, romance, and gangsterism.

New Dress for an Old One

THIS IS MY AFFAIR, 20th Century-Fox. Associate producer, Kenneth Macgowan; director, William A. Seiter; story and screen play, Allen Rivkin and Lamar Trotti; photographer, Robert Planck; music director, Arthur Lange; dance director, Jack Haskell; assistant director, Earl Haley. Cast: Robert Taylor, Barbara Stanwyck, Victor McLaglen, Brian Donlevy, Sidney Blackmer, John Carradine, Alan Dinehart, Douglas Fowley, Robert McWade, Frank Conroy, Sig Rumann, Marjorie Weaver, J. C. Nugent, Tyler Brooke, Willard Robertson, Paul Hurst, Douglas Wood, Jonathan Hale, John Hamilton, Joseph Crehan, Mary Young, Maurice Cass, Paul McVey, Jayne Regan, Ruth Gillette, Jim Donlan, Davison Clark, Fred Santley, Helen Brown, De Witt Jennings.

EXCELLENT entertainment. It takes us back to the turn of the century and makes its reaction visually and psychologically authentic. My memory goes back far

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enough to qualify me as an amateur expert in giving credit to Rudolph Sternad, art director, and Thomas Little, who dressed the sets, for their meticulous attention to details in bringing us in visual terms the period of the story. Royer—male or female I know not—also deserves praise for designing the costumes which play their part in making the recent yesterday live again before our eyes. If all the rest of the production were quite ordinary, This Is My Affair would be well worth viewing merely as something to look at.

But all the rest of the production matches in appeal its visual qualities. For one thing, it gives us Barbara Stanwyck in perhaps her best performance; and for another, it has a really startling portrait of the late President Theodore Roosevelt brought back to life by the magnificents acting of Sidney Blackmer; another, equally as vivid but of less story prominence, of the late Admiral Dewey, vividly depicted by Robert McWade; a third, Frank Conroy's masterly President William McKinley, accurate in every detail, even to the twitching of his cheek. Kenneth Macgowan, Darryl Zanuck's lieutenant in producing the picture, was fortunate in being able to secure three actors for these historical impersonations who, with the aid of make-up geniuses, could be physically such striking likenesses of the originals, but who possessed also the ability to make them live again before our eyes as impressively as if they had stepped from history's pages and played the parts in person. Certainly those who retain personal memories of the first President Roosevelt will acclaim Blackmer's impersonation as one of the screen's great acting achievements.

HE charm of Barbara Stanwyck's personality is enough in itself to make me enjoy each of her screen appearances. I like her performance in this picture better than any other because her personality so exactly fits the part and the period of the story. Her popularity with the patrons of the place in which she sings and dances is understandable, and her reaction to the situations in which she finds herself is at all times natural. She should be grateful to William Seiter for his intelligent and sympathetic direction. Only a combination of good direction and rare ability could have produced a performance which never suggests either direction or acting. Robert Taylor is satisfactory in all phases of his performance which present him as a man of action, but if he is to retain his vast popularity he must give heed to the development of ability to depict emotion less mechanically than he has thus far in his career. His romantic moments lack true romantic flavor.

Victor McLaglen plays a burly part written with more regard for its status as a characterization than for its logical inclusion as a story element. He is much too dumb to be believable as the chief lieutenant of a master bank-robber. But a thoroughly believable master criminal is Brian Donlevy who is perfect as the quiet, unemotional, motivating force of the story. Tyler Brooke goes back to his song-and-dance days and gives a capital performance. In all, I see thirty names on the cast sheet given me at the preview. Every one weaves something into the pattern of the story, and as the pattern as a whole is a highly creditable screen accomplishment, all

those contributing to it are entitled to praise. Among the contributors are Mack Gordon and Harry Revel, whose musical embellishment is a big factor in the success of the picture as a piece of screen entertainment. One number in which the beauty of the music is matched by the beauty of the lyric, is sung appealingly by Barbara and should attain popularity.

AN outstanding feature of Seiter's direction is his handling of mass shots. In sequences showing what today we would call a night club, Bill reveals direction at its best. The place always is full of customers and waiters, tables are close together and a great deal is going on. So many of such scenes have their wooden spots—extras obviously at a loss to know what to do, waiters who do not know how to wait—bits here and there to remind us we are looking at a motion picture. Seiter gives us a beautiful exhibition of ordered disorder, of hurry and bustle, of patrons and waiters colliding at times, until all the scenes attain a greater degree of naturalness than I have seen in any other production containing such shots. In all other departments Seiter's direction is equally able, the light, delicate touches being as impressive as the big dramatic moments.

The story, which made the whole thing possible as excellent screen fare, is a queer one. In essence it is the same gangster tale we have seen scores of times. As it approaches its climax we fairly can hear the saws hewing pieces out of previous pictures and the hammers pounding them together to form this one. But Allen Rivkin and Lamar Trotti are a pair of brilliant fellows. They knew they had only the usual position in which the police commissioner finds himself when the master criminal proves too much for him, the same girl to save the hero's neck at the last moment, and all the other old situations. So they made the police commissioner into an actual President of the United States, made McKinley's assassination the high point of the climax, and picked other embellishments out of the pages of rather freshly printed history. If the result does not please you mightily, then there must be something the matter with you, for certainly there is nothing the matter with This Is My Affair.

A Trifle Too Elemental

MICHAEL O'HALLORAN, Republic production and release. Associate producer, Herman Schlom; directed by Karl Brown; screen play by Adele Buffington; from the Gene Stratton-Porter story; photographed by Jack Marta; film editor, Edward Mann; musical supervision, Alberto Colombo. Cast: Wynne Gibson, Warren Hull, Jackie Moran, Charlene Wyatt, Sidney Blackmer, Hope Manning, G. P. Huntley, Jr., Robert Greig, Helen Lowell, Vera Gordon, Pierre Watkin, Dorothy Vaughan, Bodil Rosing, Guy Usher. Running time, 65 minutes.

STORY material admirably adapted to the requirements of the silent screen, does not stand up so well under talkie treatment. Gene Stratton Porter wrote for the yesterday of our rapidly changing psychology, of horse-and-buggy days when our emotions were susceptible to more elemental appeal than we demand now. Adele Buffington wrote Michael O'Halloran into a thoroughly satisfactroy shooting script, but in obeying Republic's request for an up-to-date setting, for automobiles

instead of buggies, transplanted yesterday's emotions in strange soil which does not produce the best results. Karl Brown's direction reveals greater regard for the emotions themselves than for our changed attitude toward them, permitting members of his cast to give them the extravagant expression which used to please us when pictures were silent. In those days, when the screen did little more than supply our imaginations with suggestions which we fashioned to accommodate our own individual requirements in the way of entertainment, we provided our own interpretations of the situations, speeches and facial expressions of the players, it was easy to satisfy us as each of us saw in the picture what pleased him most. If the producers had presented the dated story in its original dress, it would have had greater audience appeal.

N addition to the screen play by Miss Buffington, there is another excellent contribution to the picture by Alberto Colombo whose musical score is woven expertly into the story pattern. Warren Hull, with everything to make him a big success in big pictures, gives a smooth, easy and natural performance. Sidney Blackmer, one of the most talented actors available to producers, is seen here in a short part which he makes most impressive. Wynne Gibson comes back to us after a long absence and is the victim of the most out-moded role in the picture, unreasonably unsympathetic until near the end, and then it goes too far in the other direction. However, Wynne is to be credited with doing as well with it as anyone could. G. P. Huntley, Jr. also is excellent, and Robert Greig's butler is done admirably. There are two clever children, Charlene Wyatt and Jackie Moran.

We old timers should extend thanks to Republic for letting us see Vera Gordon again. I thought the entire film industry had forgotten what a great actress she is. Helen Lowell, Dorothy Vaughan and Bodil Rosing are other character women who deserve mention. Hope Manning, new to the screen, shows distinctive promise.

Andrew Stone Delivers

THE GIRL SAID NO, Grand National. Producer-director, Andrew L. Stone; story, Andrew L. Stone; screen play, Betty Laidlaw and Robert Lively; photographer, Ira Morgan; musical director, Arthur Kay. Cast: Irene Hervey, Robert Armstrong, Paula Stone, William Danforth, Vera Ross, Vivion Hart, Ed Brophy, Harry Tylor, Richard Rogers, Frank Moulan, Josef Swickard, Arthur Kay, Horace Murphy, Bert Roach, Allan Rogers, Max Davidson, Carita Crawford.

HERE is one whose entertainment value I do not feel myself competent to judge. The first stage attraction I ever saw was a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's H. M. S. Pinafore. It was given in a hall over a furniture store in Orillia, Ontario, where I was born. Since that time I have been a devoted Gilbert and Sullivan fan. I can recite the words of a score or more of Gilbert's lyrics, and can hum—off key, of course—the music Sullivan wrote for them and for a couple of score more. So, you see, when a picture comes along and gives me bits from a half dozen of my favorite light operas, played and sung as excellently as they are in The Girl Said No—well, I practically go nuts, and, for the life of me, cannot believe you would fail to be as delighted with it as I

was. I never have seen *Mikado* scenes staged and sung more effectively than we have them here. There is a swing to the Sullivan music which should appeal to the current taste, and, of course, there never has been a librettist to compare with Gilbert.

"Written and Directed by Andrew Stone," the credits read. Although it is half a dozen years since I have seen him, I recall the earnest young man who used to call on me and reveal in his end of our discussions an intelligent grasp of screen fundamentals and his intense desire to give expression to his conception of them. The Girl Said No not only is worthy example of screen craftsmanship. but holds out promise of further important things we can expect to come from the same young man. His first feature-length offering in no particular suggests an amateur's tentative approach to a big job. Both in story and direction it is an excellent piece of work, an even balance being maintained between its various phases, humor, romance, and musical interludes being presented with equal authority. Put Andrew Stone down as a young man who will bear watching.

THE series of such pictures based on outstanding musical themes which it is Stone's intention to make for Grand National release should find great favor by the public. The music has solid worth and Stone may be relied upon to write stories worthy of it. In this first one he presents four artists with long training in the light operas and with singing and acting ability to do full justice to them. Unless you are constituted weirdly that you cannot see merit in the Sullivan music or humor in the Gilbert lines, you by all means should see The Girl Said No. The large preview audience applauded it heartily, and I have heard enough preview applause to know in this instance it was sincere.

Irene Hervey was an admirable choice for the leading feminine part. Hard-boiled in the gold-digger phase of her characterization, tender in her romantic scenes, always pleasant to look at, possessed of a singing voice worth listening to, she responded to Stone's direction so intelligently that her performance is by long odds the best of her screen career. Bob Armstrong reverts again to his habit of reading his lines much too loudly, and as all the other players read theirs in ordinary conversational tones, the presumption is that the director found it impossible to get Bob to pay more attention to the meaning of his dialogue and less to an effort to see how much noise he could make with it. Edward Brophy, Harry Tyler, Richard Tucker, Paula Stone are among others who acquit themselves with distinction. All the performances reflect credit on Stone's direction. Betty Laidlaw and Robert Lively wrote an excellent screen play, Louis J. Rachmil designed an imposing production and Ira Morgan photographed it artistically. A big share of the picture's success is due to the masterly musical direction of Arthur Kay.

Missed Opportunities

HOTEL HAYWIRE, Paramount production and release. Directed by George Archainbaud; produced by the General Manager's office; screen play and original story by Preston Sturges; photographed by Henry Sharp; musical direction by Boris Morros; art direction by Hans Dreier and Robert Odell; film editor, Arthur Schmidt; assistant director, Stanley Goldsmith; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman. Cast: Leo Carrillo, Lynne Overman, Mary Carlisle, Benny Baker, Spring Byington, George Barbier, Porter Hall, Collette Lyons, John Patterson, Terry Ray, Nick Lukats, Josephine Whittell, Guy Usher, Lucien Littlefield, Chester Conklin. Running time, 66 minutes.

FAST moving farce comedy of amusing situations A and good performances. If your aural nerves can stand the noise it makes, your sense of humor should keep you entertained for the hour it takes to unwind Hotel Haywire. There will be nothing in it for you, however, if you begin to think while it is unwinding. It is designed solely to provide you with some comfortable giggles if you can find no other way in which to dispose of an idle hour. George Archainbaud directed with as much skill as the script gave him opportunities to display, Paramount mounted it adequately, Boris Morros provided some scattered doses of good music, and Henry Sharp came through with first class photography. Preston Sturges wrote an amusing screen play, but apparently forgot all about Benny Baker and a spry miss named Collette Lyons, until someone reminded him they were to be included among the players. So he proceeded to stick them on the outside, like a brake on a wheel to keep it from going too fast. They have nothing to do with the story but are successful as brakes to slow its progress whenever they appear.

Paramount at last realized what Lynne Overman has made apparent in each of the many small parts he has played—that he is one of the cleverest comedians available to pictures. It is an old plaint of the Spectator that Hollywood should cease exploring the world for fresh talent and develop what it already has on hand. Overman would be today one of the best box-office bets in the business if some producer had been wise enough to see his possibilities as a comedian when he first appeared on the screen. And he is only one of the scores of clever people with box-office possibilities one can spot in small parts in almost every picture. In Hotel Haywire Spring Byington reveals comedy talents which in no way impair

the charm of her personality.

BUT the outstanding feature of this Paramount offering which anyone with an ounce of picture brains can recognize is the opportunity it gave its producers to make a motion picture. It is a comedy of situations which cries aloud for expression by the camera. Instead, it is a constant chatter from beginning to end, and there are not a dozen clever lines in it to justify the dialogue treatment given it. It keeps its audience on edge to catch what is being said; makes it afraid to laugh too much lest it will miss some story point in a speech. And nine-tenths of the speeches do not contain anything which could not have been expressed better by the camera.

That current screen offerings contain too much talk is apparent to the dullest person who thinks in terms of the screen. Paramount as an organization has made more pictures than any other producing company, yet its activities for a quarter of a century apparently have not taught it to recognize real motion picture material in a story it is about to film. While I laughted heartily at many of the amusing situations in *Hotel Haywire*, I wept mentally over the treatment accorded it. It so easily could

have been made a brilliant comedy, one which could have pointed the road back to cinematic sanity for the entire film industry—a quiet comedy which gave its audience little to listen to and much to look at; which permitted it to laugh without fear of missing anything; which was a mental rest instead of mental exertion. Producers are blaming everyone but themselves for the poor box-office returns from the ordinary run of pictures, not being wise enough to know it is their own lack of screen wisdom which threatens the industry with grave financial complications.

Another Comes from Russia

REVOLUTIONISTS. Produced by Mosfilm, Moscow, U.S.S.R. Directed by Vera Stroyeva. Cast: B. V. Shchukin, N. P. Khmelev, K. I. Tarasova, V. P. Maretskaya.

Reviewed by Edward LeVeque

I went to see this picture intent upon comparing its technic with our Hollywood product, but it was so absorbing that it dragged me into oblivion, and only with painful difficulty did I occasionally manage to withdraw my attention to appraise it with an analytic mind. Surprising, but these Russians seem to be able to contrive honest to goodness entertainment without resorting to smut or to cute antics of drunken sots.

The story is episodic, embracing a period of ten years, and deals with the first stages of marxism in Imperial Russia up to the outbreak of the unsuccessful revolution of 1906; and the activities of a handful of humanitarian revolutionists who, although constantly facing exile and death, nearly succeed in crumbling the foundation of a

mighty empire.

But it is not its historical phase which makes this reproduction so engrossing, since it is not a glamorous or romantic epoch for popular appeal; its fascination is due to its illusion of frank realism; and because we become intimately acquainted with the principal characters to the extent that we cannot conceive them as mere actors playing parts. In fact, reality is so consistently maintained, that when the working expectant mother speaks of her unborn child, we do not question it, as we do with many of our expectant screen mothers, who, even in the last stages, remain as wasp-waisted as slim debutantes. This working mother, however, was perfectly natural and proper. The only characterization which at times struck a false note, was the irascible chair-warming officer, who, in an obvious attempt at mirth, would choke with his own words.

The camera, as in most Russian pictures, maintains the mood with a monotonously heavy hand; and the mood being one of drabness and despair, was mercilessly accentuated until one feels like tearing it asunder to help liberate those whom it so ruthlessly crushes, which is exactly the sympathy it is intended to draw from the beholder; sympathy for the liberation of an oppressed people steeped in superstition.

The assemblage or cutting is at times startling because of its abrupt choppiness. Our Hollywood trained cutters seem to excel all others in smoothness of continuity.

The Hollywood theory of sound is apparently that everything must be heard. If a letter is torn open we hear the rip of the paper, and in a scuffle every thud and bump, even if these sounds have no significance whatsoever upon the story. Not so the Russians; they use sound cautiously, and outside of the dialogue, they employ it to intensify or highlight some particular bit of dramatic action. As far as I can remember—as I said before, I became lost in the story—I was not conscious of that steady, crackling of incidental sounds so prevalent in our pictures.

The remarkable part is that this forcible and virile picture was directed by a young woman.

Night of Nausea

NIGHT OF MYSTERY, Paramount production and release. Directed by E. A. Dupont; screen play by Frank Partos and Gladys Unger; based on the novel, THE GREENE MURDER CASE, by Harry Fischbeck; musical direction by Boris Morros; film editor, James Smith; art direction by Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; sound by Walter Oberst and Louis Mesenkop; interior decoration by A. E. Freudeman; assistant director, Hal Walker. Cast: Grant Richards, Roscoe Karns, Helen Burgess, Ruth Coleman, Elizabeth Patterson, Harvey Stephens, June Martel, Terry Ray, Purnell Pratt, Colin Tapley, James Bush, Ivan Simpson, Greta Meyer, Leonard Carey, Nora Cecil, George Anderson. Running time, 76 minutes.

Reviewed by Paul Jacobs

THERE are occasions in the comparatively placid life of a reviewer when he wishes he were either a producer or a hermit. While reviewing Night of Mystery, I wanted to be a producer just long enough to fire the director, scrap the film, punch the boy-scripter, spank his lady co-writer and insult the editor. After that I just wanted to be a hermit and never see another of Paramount's "best show in town." It is a gorgeous example of exactly how not to make a picture. The strength of the whole plot rests on the careful build-up of the underlying psychology of a diseased mind. Without complete understanding of this, the story is pointless. It should have been fully developed by the camera. The brilliant script allowed it about two minutes of hasty dialogue.

And the cutting must have been done as a gag. At least it is a remarkable expression of what D. W. Griffith once referred to as a "cutting drunk." Which is to say, in the kindliest way possible, that a child with a pair of shears could do better. And thence to the characterizing, which also violates all laws of audience-reaction. We are made to hate the women who suddenly becomes our lovable heroine; we fall desperately in love with the only sweet girl in the picture, only to find that she is a nasty imbecile and a ruthless killer. Eventually these high-paid writers may learn that inconsistent characterization is resented by everyone in the audience as a personal form of cheating.

THE detective, pride of the force, obviously is an escaped idiot. And so forth. What is the use of further dissection? However, from this morbid welter there emerges a few thin rays of sunshine. Grant Richards, as Philo Vance, genuinely is good despite his three-fold handicap of poor direction, inexperience, and the formidable precedent created by such masters as Wm. Powell, Warren William and Basil Rathbone. If he is given a half-chance, Mr. Richards will make a name for himself in films.

Roscoe Karns, fortunately, is too good to be submerged; his portrayal is competent. Too bad he is not given something his talents deserve. Helen Burgess gives a top job of acting; considering the direction, or lack of it, her work is outstanding. And that goes for Elizabeth Patterson, a grand trouper. Harvey Stevens seems to recognize the futility of wasting his efforts, but his performance is good. Purnell Pratt is his usual dependable self; and Colin Tappley gives us a perfect bit. His appearance was much too short. Greta Meyer turns in an excellent job. And Ivan Simpson remains the perfect mystery butler.

Too bad that impossible writing, incompetent direction and preposterous editing must doom the fine efforts of top-notch actors. But that is Hollywood. By the way, in case I have not made the idea clear—do not see A Night of Mystery. It is not mystery; it is nausea.

Film Industry's Latest Folly

RED Kann, in a recent issue of Motion Picture Daily, makes some pertinent remarks about the latest revelation of how low the film industry can go in the way of what any other industry would characterize as an exhibition of rotten taste. Kann raises about the same objection to the employment of stripteasers as the SPECTATOR has made, and winds up his argument with these paragraphs:

It is a very hot potato the industry is playing with. King Vidor made the Los Angeles Times the other day with a rather

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extended beef about censorship restrictions. Supervisors, here and there, are yelling because the lines are drawing tighter. They may not be responsible, but certainly their principals are for drawing the noose closer. In a vague and general way, Hollywood wonders why it cannot do this or that. It rends the atmosphere with trivia and overlooks the overtones which, sooner or later and somewhere along the line, will sound off ominously on major errors such as the wholesale plunge into trouble, this time labeled striptease.

Producers, by their own voluntary action and if they can recall, put teeth in the production code three years ago. Compelled to turn away from old fetishes, they conceived new ones which evidenced themselves in product on a plane never befor attained. There is no actual violation, it is true, in employing striptease performers. As a matter of fact, probably they will be overdressed in a clumsy gesture to dodge criticism. Yet those who know the background, at the same time, will know what to look for and imagine it if they cannot find it. The newspapers of the nation know the circumstances and may be expected to report them.

ROBERT CRANDALL

Supervising Editor

"HOLLYWOOD COWBOY"

"Smart Editing by Robert Crandall."
—HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR.

Starting "WINDJAMMER"

EWING SCOTT

DIRECTED

GEORGE O'BRIEN
IN

"HOLLYWOOD COWBOY"

Original Screen Play by DAN JARRETT and EWING SCOTT

Hollywood Spectator:

"The versatile Mr. Scott also directed. That a director collaborated on his own story is nothing new; but that a director writes a good story, or that a writer does a good job of direction, is news...Mr. Scott knows the rare combination of dramatic and cinematic values...He is on his way to the top."

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Associate Producer

'Hollywood Cowboy'

Hollywood cowboy rides, and he rides in a western that is swell entertainment. The great majority will welcome it as it has all the stuff the masses go for. Those affiliated with the production can take bows for contributing to a really entertaining film.

—DAILY VARIETY.

Here is a western that breaks all precedent by achieving originality while preserving all the hallowed ingredients—all, that is, except gunplay and killings. It also develops an unusually high content of natural comedy from its unforced situations. The result is exceptionally good action entertainment.—HOLLYWOOD REPORTER.

DAN JARRETT*

Original and Screen Play

'Hollywood Cowboy'

*In Collaboration

Dan Jarrett and Ewing Scott, for example, give us a swell story, about the idolized film cowboy who goes western and shows the cow-country how cowpunchers should punch their cows. Not content with this twist, Mr. Jarrett and Mr. Scott mix in cleverly a dash of racketeering, eastern flavor, and a shot of aeronautics—all blended to taste.—HOLLYWOOD SPECTATOR.

Dan Jarrett and Ewing Scott devised the story and developed it exceptionally well.

—HOLLYWOOD REPORTER.

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SPECTATOR

Twelfth Year

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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Gene Lockhart Writes on "Is It Acting?"

Bert Harlen Pinch Hits For The Editor

A Theory of Imaginative Sound in Motion Pictures is Advanced by Edward LeVeque

THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA * EASY LIVING * TOPPER * PARADISE ISLE

WAR LORD * THE TOAST OF NEW YORK * THE SINGING MARINE

LOVE IN A BUNGALOW * HOOSIER SCHOOLBOY

WINDJAMMER * SUPER SLEUTH

THE EDITOR'S MOST UNEASY CHAIR

By BERT HARLEN

WHILE my esteemed editor is basking on the beach at Santa Barbara, inviting his soul among the redwoods, and searching the desert stars, it is my lot to sit in his easy chair—suddenly become most uneasy—and to fill the pages of his department with such pertinent comment as I can contrive. Believe me, this is a task which I approach with humility. I must confess it is only with undertaking to serve his function that I have come completely to realize how much a part of the Hollywood scene Welford Beaton is—the extent of his personal contacts and his almost clairvoyant ability to anticipate what goes on in the film city-or fully to appreciate the insight with which he treats of cinematic matters, as well as the grace with which he expresses himself. I can only beg the reader's indulgence for my own simple commentary, appearing in this one issue, which I know cannot approach in merit that of my superior. Persistence, however, is a great virtue, and charity is an even greater one; and if you, kind reader, can be persuaded to approach these pages with both, it is not impossible that you may find some small amusement or information on them.

At any rate, I hope that my esteemed editor is frisking, lolling, and soul-searching like all get-out, and having a grand time doing it.

ENTERING the outer lobby of a theatre the other evening I abruptly stepped on Barbara Stanwyck's face! Yes, there it was looming large beneath my feet, and I had narrowly missed scuffing Joel McCrea in the eye. The features of both were emblazoned in full color across nearly the entire floor of the lobby, along with the admonition that Internes Can't Take Money.

This masterly stroke of exploitation should be seen by all showmen, that it might inspire them to greater efforts. There are display media about theatres that are shamefully neglected—great expanses of wall on either side of the audience utterly barren except for a few architectural furbelows, and all that carpeted space in the inner lobby with nothing on it but a few stoves and automobiles to be given away. Opportunities are boundless. As a further illustration, the dress on the girl in the ticket booth (and, of course, the booth itself) could be lettered up to boost the picture, instead of having that flower design. Even the idle planes of her face are suggestive. And when these possibilities are exhausted, why not paint up the street a bit?

Remember that benighted era when picture theatres, at least the better ones, prided themselves on a certain taste and dignity in their display and general management, before the modern methods were acquired from burlesque houses? And remember those absurd fortypiece symphony orchestras in the pit, and those silly ballet dancers on the stage? Still, I'm told pictures used to make money in those days.

UNDOUBTEDLY the most convincing corpse I have seen in pictures is that impersonated by Henry Daniell in The Thirteenth Chair, who either through a rare techunique or extraordinary luck with lighting and camera angles managed to convey a good measure of the awe and terror actually surrounding a dead man. Why are dead men usually so unconvincing on the screen? The fact that we know they are not really dead is no answer, for our faith in drama, that "willing suspension of disbelief" as Coleridge puts it, leads us to accept all other states of man without question, providing such states are portrayed with reasonable accuracy. Of course, most of the dead men in films are not very artfully contrived, a curious animation remaining on their faces, if indeed their tummies do not fluctuate ever so slightly; but the better corpses are arranged with considerable skill.

The only actually dead man I have seen in pictures, at least at close range, was "Baby Face" Nelson, whose sudden appearance was shocking and terrifying in a way I shall never forget. I am told that faintings were common in theatres where the film was exhibited. Can it be that the camera, noted for "photographing the mind," had caught and magnified some physiological or psychological characteristics of death which were too subtle yet to have come within the scope of human analysis?

THERE are probably more crookedly-hung pictures in Hollywood than in any other city in the world, because of the vast quantities signed and dispatched by the cinema actors in courting favor, and the penchant the natives have for keeping them displayed in neat black frames on all available wall space. As a harmony-loving soul, I can lose sleep by thinking of the thousands and thousands of black-framed poses that must be hanging on walls all over town a quarter of an inch to an inch askew. There is a boulevard drug store boasting a high wall littered with the things, and all of them slightly cockeyed. I can't even grab coffee there without getting "the jitters." One Saturday afternoon when I was alone in the Spectator office I went about and straightened our collection-gently tilted Janet Gaynor up half an inch, leveled Charlie Chaplin, and gave good old Bill Hart an especially precise adjustment. But already they are all askew again, and I don't know when I shall get around to straightening them.

IN a truly anomalous position is the radio actor in Hollywood, whose vocal dramatic renditions go out over the air lanes along with those of stellar film performers in condensations of motion picture scripts and other radio fare. He has a brief half hour of glory, his histrionics commanding as much attention from the millions of listeners as those of the greatest celebrity with whom he may be playing. The performance concluded, the film star smiles or murmurs a benign good night, steps into a

glossy limousine, and is speeded away to an estate in Beverly Hills or Flintridge. The radio actor climbs into his '34 Chrysler roadster and drives to a small "Bohemian" apartment, his performance already a thing forgotten, except perhaps by a few of his colleagues or a radio columnist who may deign to mention it the next morning.

As frequently as not the fellow is not even given microphone credit for his performance. And a voice, unless given an extraordinary build-up, apparently has difficulty in registering in the listener's memory. One would think, however, that motion picture producers, assertedly in despair over the scarcity of talent, would direct some attention to the voices heard constantly as an accompaniment to the performances of their stars. That they don't is another of the curious paradoxes of our topsy-turvy town.

AN actor friend of mine "in radio" has, during the past two years, played with practically every top-notch actor and actress in the film industry, including a performance of the male lead opposite a female star doing a part which had won her the Academy Award—and out of it all the fellow hasn't as yet even got a screen test! True, he is not a collar-ad boy, but he could hold his own in that respect. "Nothing is so dead as a past radio performance," he says.

The situation is all the more remarkable when the recent influx to the studios of actors from eastern radio programs is considered, Don Ameche, Marian and Jim Jordan, and others, who have been fortunate enough to receive good build-ups on the eastern programs. The adaptability of radio performers to the screen should have been established definitely by the signing of these players. Yet the only radio actor of my acquaintance on the home ground who has reached featured position on the screen is a character man, definitely a gangster type, who was clever enough to secure himself some parts in local little theatres, where he could be seen as well as heard.

ONE would think that the smallness of number of the radio performers in this city would be a circumstance in their favor for finding screen recognition. Actually most of the radio work in these parts, including electrical transcription programs, is done almost entirely by a small coterie of actors, scarcely two dozen all told. The voice being the sole instrument of a broadcast performance, radio producers attach a great deal of importance to it, and it seems that the little black demon, the microphone, plays favorites. A very pleasing and expressive natural speaking voice may be sucked in by the little disc and whisked out to the countless loudspeakers as thin, nasal, or muffled—it's a matter of physics.

The discrepancy between the fortunes of players engaged in the two mediums here is further accentuated by the fact that radio actors in this city receive, at least in most productions, but a fraction of the salary paid those in Chicago and New York. A performance on a chain

broadcast in those cities pays generally from seventy-five dollars to one hundred dollars and better, with local broadcasts running around twenty-five dollars. An actor in demand can average an income of between three and four hundred dollars a week, which is a salary comparable with that of many screen players. But in Los Angeles the chain programs pay around twenty-five dollars and the local programs as low as five. There are a few transcontinental broadcasts that pay salaries comparable with the eastern shows, but they are exceptional. In view of the smallness of their coterie, it would appear that the local lads and lassies aren't being especially clever.

HEAR tell, however, that Paula Winslowe, she of the extraordinarily lovely radio voice, and a gifted trouper to boot, following her ascent to featured position on the Al Jolson, Joe Penner, and other programs, has been approached for screen tests out Hollywood way. La Winslowe was a colleague of mine in the same racket some moons ago, when I was very young and sometimes very foolish, and before the delights of the literary life and its attending contemplation of the profounder aspects of the draw-ma, engaged me. Good luck, "Winnie."

0^{NE} of the most engaging manifestations of the new trend in motion pictures toward what Philip Scheuer of trend in motion pictures toward what Philip Scheuer of the Times characterizes as "flippancy," is to be seen in I Met Him In Paris. Just how the tendency started is impossible to say. The origin of a psychological movement among a people can never be conclusively traced. Noel Coward is probably more directly responsible for this one than any other individual. But it is a sign of healthy thinking among people, it represents a strong approach to life, a defiance, an ability to see life in perspective and a refusal to take trivialities seriously. The silliness and stupidity in some pictures following the trend is due to the fact that the true spirit has been counterfeited. This is because the characteristic behavior manifestations of the spirit are tacked on as externals, and do not emanate from within the characters. Any dramatic mode is violated when characters are depended to the action rather than the action to the characters.

MEANDER too (with apologies to my esteemed editor): People on the screen dine at the most fascinating places. . . . Are there really such restaurants in real life, where veil-tailed goldfish swim about one in aquariums, and lights glisten on carved ebony? . . . When we have out-of-town guests who want to dine at a distinctive place, we generally resort to Olvera Street, where I get indigestion. . . . Tyrone Power hasn't appeared in a bath tub yet. . . . What's become of Georgia Hale? . . . I never play the piano well after having pounded the typewriter for long . . . wonder why? . . . Martha Raye could knock over a good emotional part like nobody's business. This is a pet theory of mine. . . . I have no pets, not a single dog, nor any ducks. Once I had a pet duck called "Pepsie" but he was scared to death of everybody.

Some Late Previews

Muni's Zola a Masterpiece

THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA, Warners production and release. Hal B. Wallis, executive producer; Henry Blanke, associate producer; stars Paul Muni; directed by William Dieterle; screen play by Norman Reilly Raine, Heinz Herald and Geza Herczeg; story by Heinz Herald and Geza Herczeg; photographed by Tony Gaudio; music by Max Steiner; art direction, Anton Grot; film editor, Warren Low; assistant director, Russ Saunders; costumes, Milo Anderson and Ali Hubert; dialogue direction, Irving Rapper; makeup, Perc Westmore; musical direction, Leo F. Forbstein. Supporting players: Gale Sondergaard, Joseph Schildkraut, Gloria Holden, Donald Crisp, Erin O'Brien-Moore, John Litel, Henry O'Neill, Morris Carnovsky, Louis Calhern, Ralph Morgan, Robert Barrat, Vladimir Sokoloff, Grant Mitchell, Harry Davenport, Robert Warwick, Charles Richman, Dert Emery, Walter Kingsford, Paul Everton, Montagu Love, Frank Sheridan, Lumsden Hare, Marcia Mae Jones, Florence Roberts, Dickie Moore, Rolla Gourvitch. Running time, 123 minutes.

ONE of those great biographical films the Warner Brother artists seem to excel in spreading on the screen—another feather in the cap of Henry Blanke, who in the past two years has given us more outstanding pictures than any other production executive anywhere. And again the team of William Dieterle and Paul Muni whose brilliant contributions to it made Pasteur one of the most impressive productions ever presented on the screen. To Warner Brothers, vast credit for the honesty of their efforts to make The Life of Emile Zola one of the greatest pictures of all time.

If you can be entertained by two hours of brilliant film craftsmanship in all departments, under no circumstances must you miss Zola. It is mounted superbly and authentically, presenting graphically the Paris of Zola's day which Tony Gaudio's camera brings to us in a series of superb photographic masterpieces. Dieterle's direction seems to have been inspired, and the members of his long cast responded to his enthusiasm with a series of brilliant performances. In no spot does the direction falter or a characterization betray a weak moment.

Muni's characterization is an amazing portrait of the great French writer. Never is it Muni we see on the screen—always Zola, the champion of the truth, the lover of justice, the foe of oppressors. It is a performance which dignifies the screen as the greatest of all the arts and makes a sorry spectacle of Hollywood's persistent effort to ape the waning stage. As much by suppression as by direct expression does, Muni paint his vivid portrait. Every part of him is part of his performance, from his shuffling feet to the unruly mass of hair which adorns his head, his eyes mirroring his feelings, his voice carrying conviction, his gestures as eloquent as the words he utters.

QUITE as remarkable is the performance of Joseph Schildkraut as the unfortunate Dreyfus. In the hands of a less brilliant artist the part would have been a minor, negative one. Scarcely a score of lines are read by Schildkraut, and his greatest scenes are close-ups, his features immobile, only his eyes alive, yet several times the large preview audience rewarded the close-ups with bursts of appreciative applause. In all my picture reviewing of

over a dozen years I cannot recall such physically static scenes having been rewarded in a like manner.

As the wife of Dreyfus, Gale Sondergaard gives us another great performance which marks her as an artist of rare ability. She indulges in no heroics, sheds no tears, but in her quiet way registers powerfully her grief over the fate of her husband. As the wife of Zola, Gloria Holden is prominent among the group of people who tell the story. Donald Crisp also contributes a strong characterization, as do many more, the names being too numerous to mention individually.

Max Steiner provided the picture with a score of outstanding merit, and Leo Forbstein directed it in a manner which makes it an important feature of the production. To the art direction of Anton Grot is to be credited one of the most visually impressive mountings any picture has had. And mention must be made of the able manner in which Warren Low has edited the long film. The costumes, designed by Milo Anderson also are a big factor in adding to the authenticity and visual attractiveness of the scenes.

THEN Norman Reilly Raine, Heinz Herald and W Geza Herczeg approached the task of writing the screen play they were under the handicap of having too much story material. To keep the busy life of Zola within the limits of a motion picture was no easy task. But they committed the fault of not balancing evenly their condensation and their elaboration. The result is a picture which is too long for those who view pictures for their story content and not with an eye to its technical cinematic merit. Another difficulty the writers faced was the fact of our knowing at the outset what was going to happen. The Dreyfus Affair is history, and there can be no surprises in its retelling. For instance, we knew before the picture started that Zola fought for justice for Dreyfus, hence the several scenes showing his first objections to taking up the case served merely to delay action we knew was inevitable, and to that extent retarded the story. These scenes gave Muni an opportunity to display his acting skill, but we view pictures for their story action and not as exhibitions of acting.

The elaborate and brilliantly presented court room sequence was for the purpose of showing the unfairness of the trial of Zola. Witness after witness was used to register a fact which was planted by the first one. If the story had been fiction, so many witnesses might have been permissible, but as we knew in advance how the trial had ended, a hint of the unfairness would have been sufficient. Again, the imposing spectacle of Zola's funeral prolongs the film unnecessarily. The story ends with his death and the funeral adds nothing to it as an appendix to a story already told. I cannot see complete box-office success in the two-hour film, but the spots I have mentioned offer opportunities for cutting to bring it within reasonable limits.—W. B.

Para Presents Farcical Uproar

EASY LIVING, Paramount. Producer, Arthur Hornblow, Jr.; director, Mitchell Leisen; screen play, Preston Sturges; based on story by Vera Caspary; photographer, Ted Tetzlaff; special effects, Farciot Edouart; film editor, Doane Harrison; art director, Hans Dreier and Ernest Fegte; musical director, Boris Morros; costumes,

Travis Banton; assistant director, Edgar Anderson. Cast: Jean Arthur, Edward Arnold, Ray Milland, Luis Alberni, Mary Nash, Franklin Pangborn, Barlowe Borland, William Demarest, Andrew Tombes, Esther Dale, Harlan Briggs, William B. Davidson, Nora Cecil, Robert Greig.

WHEN awards are distributed for the best this and that in pictures for 1937, Paramount should be given one for having presented the loudest production of the year. If you can stand the terrific and wholly unnecessary noise it makes, you will find Easy Living an amusing farce-comedy, played to the hilt by a capable cast, beautifully mounted by Paramount and kept moving swiftly by the direction of Mitchell Leisen.

Pheston Sturges wrote an exceedingly clever screen play, one designed only to entertain and asking us to indulge him to the extent of entering into the fun of the thing and granting that everything could happen just as it is written into the script. Leisen interprets it broadly, but keeps just this side of slapstick except in the matter of the dialogue direction. There he goes haywire. Intelligent direction of farce is to show reasonable people doing unreasonable things in a reasonable way. For instance—we could not be entertained by a group of mentally deficient people doing ridiculous things. That is what we expect of them. But mentally alert people doing the same things would amuse us.

ALTHOUGH the situations in Easy Living ask us to take quite a lot for granted, we meet it half way and accept what it offers as things which perhaps could happen. But we cannot agree that the people in the story would yell their heads off every time they spoke to each other. Edward Arnold is characterized as the third largest banker in New York, one whose word could make or break the market, yet he yells his way through the entire length of the film, noise being his only means of expression. We are indebted to him, however, for indulging only once in the insane bellow he ordinarily uses for laughter. Other characters also indulge in yelling until the din at times is terrific. If the picture had been presented with a sense of humor, the full value of the excellent screen play would have been developed and we would have had another MyMan Godfrey or It Happened One Night. The stuff was in it, but it was lost in the uproar.

Jean Arthur and Luis Alberni pretty well divide the picture between them, though Ray Milland, Franklin Pangborn and Robert Greig do some good work. Jean again demonstrates what an exceedingly clever girl she is. The Paramount art department outdid itself in providing elaborate but artistic sets.

Put on your ear muffs and see Easy Living. It will give

you many a good laugh.

And now Mrs. Spectator and I are off to distant points to forget pictures for a couple of weeks. I leave the rest of the reviewing for this issue in the supercritical hands of Bert Harlen.—W. B.

Twelve pictures scheduled to be made by Selznick International Pictures will cost \$12,500,000, more than a million each.

Reviews by Bert Harlen

Novelty Amidst Story Troubles

TOPPER, Roach-MGM. Producer, Hal Roach; associate producer, Milton H. Bren; director, Norman Z. McLeod; original novel, Thorne Smith; screen play, Jack Jevne, Eric Hatch and Eddie Moran; photographer, Norbert Brodine; photographic effects, Roy Seawright; film editor, William Terhune; music and lyrics, Hoagy Carmichael; art director, Arthur I. Royce. Cast: Constance Bennett, Cary Grant, Roland Young, Billie Burke, Alan Mowbray, Eugene Pallette, Arthur Lake, Hedda Hopper, Virginia Sale, Theodore Von Eltz, J. Farrell McDonald, Elaine Shepard, Doodles Weaver, Si Jenks, Three Hits and a Miss.

A PERFECTLY grand "binge," in which Constance Bennett and Cary Grant make the rounds of the night spots, imbibing and cavorting with rare good spirits, and sleep it off in their luxurious if rather bizzare roadster parked on a main street, is the opening of Topper, and certainly it gets the comedy off to a good start. Constance Bennett and Cary Grant team delightfully as the madcap and wealthy Mr. and Mrs. Kerby, the performance of each complementing that of the other. The feminine star has never looked more attractive or played with greater zest. Norman McLeod has directed the "binge" with a subtle sense of humor, and it represents the new spirit of whimsicality in motion pictures at its best.

From there on strange things begin to happen, for the film incorporates a novel idea in stories, an idea which is at once the picture's most distinguishing feature and its greatest weakness. The gay but irresponsible young couple, speeding to their Long Island estate, run off the road and are killed. Their spirits, however, leave their bodies and continue to carry on in the same madcap way through the rest of the picture. Most of their time is spent in doing one good deed in order to pass muster with St. Peter, neither being able to recall one. That deed, they have decided, will be the regeneration of one Cosmo Topper, played by Roland Young, who, though the head of a bank, is a sorrowfully hen-pecked husband, whose very existence has become a formula under the scrutiny of his demanding and conventional wife, Billie Burke.

HE carrying out of the Kerbys' plans for Topper is made possible by the fact that they, as spirits, possess limited quantities of ectoplasm, which enables them to assume visible shape whenever they desire. Most of the time, however, they remain invisible, their presence being made known by the sound of their voices, the mysterious opening of doors, or the floating of objects through the air, which always scare spectators half out of their wits. This novel circumstance, which could be the source of a great deal of amusement if handled imaginatively and with taste, is much over-played in this picture. Some of the pranks of the invisible Kerbys are genuinely amusing, but many savor of slap-stick comedy, and others are downright silly. Moreover, there are far too many such incidents. They pad out the length of the picture, slow up the action, and disrupt the thread of the story. Some generous use of the editor's shears might help considerably.

NOTHER handicap to the story's effectiveness, how-Aever, is the fact that we do not have much sympathy for the hen-pecked Topper. Perhaps it is because the spectacle of a man of his business position being dominated by a mouse-like wife seems a rather arbitrary situation. Perhaps it is because of a general boredom with henpecked husbands, since they are to be seen in so many pictures. At any rate, the Kerbys' concern with Topper seems like a waste of time, and does not hold our interest, which lies primarily in the Kerbys themselves. Their long absences from the screen, together with their devotion to the interests of Topper when they are in the action, gives one the feeling that there is a void in the very middle of the film. Our interest in the story picks up, incidentally, toward the end of the picture, at a seaside resort, when jealousy gives the center of interest back to the couple by occasioning a slight rift between them, a fact which might be suggestive if retakes are in order.

The end of the picture, like the beginning, is thoroughly engaging. The Kerbys are perched on the roof of Topper's home like two elfins, taking in the reconciliation of Topper and his wife on terms of better understanding, going on below. In saying farewell to their friend they hang their heads downward from the roof and peer into the window, certainly a fantastic shot.

Well—the idea for the film is good, if only some way could be found to patch up the middle portion so that a coherent and interesting story would result. One wonders if the rambling incoherency of the present script is not due to the fact that the script was worked on by three writers, and taken from an original story by Thorne Smith—which makes a good many fingers in the pie. I cannot recall at the moment any first-rate script which was adapted by more than two writers. If two cannot make a coherent script out of the material at hand, by what logic does a producer conclude that three can?

BOTH Roland Young and Billie Burke are at their respectively suave and saucy best. Alan Mowbray, playing a butler to Topper, has some of the best lines in the picture, and puts them across with distinction. Says he to Topper, following an escapade which has landed the latter in the headlines, "You have become a legend before your time." Eugene Pallette, Arthur Lake, Hedda Hopper, and Virginia Sale are well cast. A very unfunny aspect of the picture is the appearance of Tom Moore, Claire Windsor, Jack Mulhall and other former stars in uncredited bits.

Deserving of a plume is Roy Seawright for his ingenious handling of the eerie photographic effects. Many of the fadings of the Kerbys were very deft. In one scene a rose is seen to move through the air, and in its course Constance Bennett materializes, holding it in her hand. Norbert Brodine was the general cinematographer. One song number is featured, "Old Man Moon," written by Hoagy Carmichael, which has good rhythm but is not on a par with his best songs. Special mention should be made of the gowns, designed by Samuel M. Lange, which set off Miss Bennett with alluring effect, and Miss Burke with most frilly effect.

Aspiration in the Tropics

PARADISE ISLE, Monogram Pictures, Associate producer, Dorothy Reid; director, Arthur Greville Collins; screen play, Marion Orth; from the Cosmopolitan story, THE BELLED PALM, by Allan Vaughan Elston; photographed by Gilbert Warrenton, A.S.C.; technical director, E. R. Hickson; recorded by William Wilmarth; film editor, Russell Schoengarth; assistant director, Harry Knight; special music by Sam Koki, Tuiteleleapaga, and Lani McIntyre and his Hawaiians; special effects by Fred Jackman. Cast: Movita, Warren Hull, William Davidson, John St. Polis, George Piltz, Pierre Watkin, Kenneth Harlan, Tau Mana, Malia Makua.

MONOGRAM PICTURES, in carrying out its asserted new policy of producing superior independent productions, could not have chosen a better locale for its initial "class" effort than the islands of the southern Pacific. Nature has provided these islands with features which are essentially good cinema material—the rhythm of the swaying palms, the lines of the gleaming and symetrical tree trunks rising obliquely out of the ground, the fantastic cloud formations set upon a clear sky, and above all a spirit of peace and escape. These features have been incorporated with fine effect in Paradise Isle. Some of Cameraman Gilbert Warrenton's shots are truly magnificent. Many of the scenes of native life, especially those showing their dances, are at once beautiful and instructive. Dorothy Reid, associate producer, who spent several months in the Samoan Islands supervising these portions of the production, can consider them a feather in her hat. Only certain defects in the story and in the structure of the film itself keep the picture from being the first-rate entertainment which it might have been.

There is a note of idealism in the story, which concerns the love of a blind artist and a native girl, and, viewed as a whole, it has a winning simplicity, but it is marred by incredible and melodramatic incidents. Why, for instance, could not the young painter have come to the island to paint and lost his sight from a fever or some tropical malignancy, instead of being washed up on the shore a blind man, and apparently the sole survivor of a wrecked ship which was carrying him to Java, where a noted eye specialist was to operate on his eyes? A really jarring incident, however, was the mutual killing of the two villains, undoubtedly the most spectacular the drama has afforded since Hamlet and Laertes exchanged weapons—the first villain shoots his antagonist just as the latter throws an antiseptic in his eyes, which compels him to falter agonizingly to a conveniently handy swamp, where he sinks with trepidation and vociferousness to the depths.

As for the construction of the film itself, the script and possibly the editing do not always serve the best interests of the story. For one thing, the succession of the shots is too rapid for the languid mood of the story. Moreover, insufficient allowance was made in either the script or the editing of the scenes for character development and character motivation. A more frequent use of close-ups would have helped in this respect. Several of the situations could stand considerable building. For instance, the introduction of the prostrate artist, weltering in the surf, seems almost casual, following abruptly on a scene in which we have barely made the acquaintance of the native girl and her native lover.

Viewed in its entirety, however, Paradise Isle is a commendable attempt for an independent studio. Certainly it will give audiences more entertainment value for their money than many of the B productions from major studios.

MOVITA, who is starred in the production, and is under contract to the company, gives a creditable account of herself in the picture. She is graceful, and extremely pretty in her dark make-up and native garb. She handles her native accent skillfully, keeps in character, and on several occasions could have evoked no little pathos if the succession of the shots had been more leisurely, making greater allowance for emotional growth. Not among her dramatic attributes, however, are the obviously penciled eyebrows, a phase of make-up concerning which Welford Beaton had some pointed words to say a few issues back.

Warren Hull handles his lines with intelligence, and plays his difficult scenes with restraint and taste. The fact that he creates no great sympathy in the spectator can be attributed to other reasons than his performance. Movita and Hull sing pleasantly together a lilting theme song, one of the composers of which has a name that I cannot resist the temptation to put into print—Tuiteleleapaga. George Piltz as the girl's native lover is thoroughly in his element, apparently being a native himself, and Tua Mana and Malia Makua also fit effectively into the scene. Pierre Watkin plays with understanding his role of the doctor. William Davidson and John St. Polis are efficiently villainous, and Kenneth Harlan, making a brief appearance, seems to be fit. Robert Lee Johnson directed.

Who Is Toasted?

THE TOAST OF NEW YORK, R.K.O. Producer, Edward Small; director, Rowland V. Lee; based on BOOK OF DANIEL DREW, by Bouck White, and ROBBER BARONS, by Matthew Josephson; screen play, Dudley Nichols, John Twist and Joel Sayre; music and lyrics, Nathaniel Shilkret, Allie Wrubel and L. Wolfe Gilbert; musical director, Nathaniel Shilkret; photographer, Peverell Marley; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate, Carroll Clark; costumes, Edward Stevenson. Cast: Edward Arnold, Cary Grant, Frances Farmer, Jack Oakie, Donald Meek, Thelma Leeds, Clarence Kolb, Billy Gilbert, George Irving, Frank M. Thomas, Russell Hicks, Oscar Apfel, Dudley Clements, Lionel Belmore, Robert McClung, Robert Dudley, Dewey Robinson, Stanley Fields, Gavin Gordon, Joyce Compton, Virginia Carroll.

GAIN the exponents of the philosophy of rugged in-A dividualism, who have played such a great part in the building of our country, come in for a cinematic expose. This time it is the period just following the Civil War that is dealt with. The Toast of New York chronicles the rise to power in the world of finance of Jim Fisk, a story ostensibly based on history. It is a colorful and frequently thought-provoking account of the man and of his era, however far it may have deviated from fact, and I suspect that the deviation is considerable. Fisk as portrayed is certainly a shrewd and daring fellow, nearly succeeding in cornering all the gold in the United States, maintaining his own regiment of soldiers, and generally wielding a dexterous set of teeth in a dog-eat-dog world. I have no doubt, however, that the film has a certain significance as cinematic fare, along with other expose films

of American history. Through them the public, especially the generation now in school, may get a clearer concept of the factors which went into the growth of this country, a knowledge which should be of value in their future conduct of it.

Appearing together again in the picture are Edward Arnold and Frances Farmer, who registered well in Gome and Get It. I feel obliged to indulge in another of those odious comparisons and record that neither is seen to quite as good advantage in this film; nor is the period recreated with the same insight. Perhaps it is because we are too far away from the earlier era. We tend to look back upon a period as long ago as the Civil War and color it with fancy, to regard it as quaint. This is exactly what The Toast of New York does. It paints a bright-hued, sometimes flamboyant, picture of the era on the one hand, while asking us to accept an expose of some of its more sordid aspects on the other, which makes for a discrepancy in viewpoint in the film.

PRODUCTION values are lavished on the picture, there is a strong cast, and Director Rowland V. Lee has seen that the story progresses smoothly. The fact that the film, despite several exciting episodes, and some well built suspense toward the climax, is lacking in the degree of "punch," of emotional stimulus, which we ordinarily expect from a feature picture of its caliber—this fact can be ascribed mainly to the discrepancy in viewpoint analyzed above and to the film's concern with finance, a subject not usually very romantic in drama. True, it has been used as a background for very romantic persons, but if the details of transactions are played up, especially the workings of the stock market, about which few persons not actively involved in commercial enterprise are well informed, the material tends to be dull.

The romantic interest in The Toast of New York is figuratively held in the back seat, since Frances Farmer is not in love with her benefactor, Arnold, and both she and Cary Grant are too loyal to their mutual friend to betray him by recognizing their love for each other. This circumstance makes Miss Farmer's role rather negative; and the role is made even more so by the fact that her character's theatrical career, despite the fortune devoted to promoting it, is scarcely sensational, the audience rising in angry protest against the prodigality of its backer, who controls a good deal of their money, on the opening night. All of which leaves one to wonder who, according to the implication of the title, is toasted. Certainly Arnold is not, on the contrary being vehemently chased out of town. Perhaps it is subtle irony the title drives at. But getting back to Miss Farmer's role—little attention is devoted to her activities in the theatre, except for some spasmodic shots of her show, a musical affair done in the most trumped-up and over-elaborate modern fashion, which makes the scenes obviously out of spirit with the rest of the film. What opportunity there is in such a stage production to gratify her desire to be "a great actress" I cannot perceive. At any rate, Miss Farmer really has little to do but look pretty and moody, both of which she does well. And I still think she has one of the most interesting voices in pictures.

July 17, 1937

DWARD ARNOLD again incarnates that curious **E** blustering vitalism so characteristic of American "big men." If his present characterization has a reminiscent ring, still it must be admitted that his work is polished and well punctuated, bringing an aliveness to the screen. Cary Grant gives another poised, sensitive performance. Donald Meek drew much of the audience interest with his amusing and well defined characterization of old Daniel Drew. Jack Oakie again plays himself and succeeds in getting many laughs, which I suppose is considered the important thing by the producers. That his work smacks of 42nd and Broadway of a far later era, and is out of key with the characterizations of other performers will doubtless be deemed a negligible matter. Billy Gilbert was excellent in a small role of a German photographer. Thelma Leeds and Clarence Kolb were prominent among several other members of the cast doing good characterization work.

Nathaniel Shilkret, in addition to directing an effective musical score, has collaborated with Allie Wrubel on two songs, and with L. Wolfe Gilbert on another, which, if not distinctive, add a good deal of color to the picture. Dudley Nichols, John Twist, and Joel Sayre, who wrote the screen play from various source material, have done a creditable job, except for the film's too detailed concern with finance. The art work, done by Van Nest Polglase, with Darrell Silvera in charge of set dressing, is of a high order, and as much can be said for the costumes by Edward Stevenson. Peverell Marley photographed the production excellently.

Atmospherically Stimulating

WAR LORD, a First National picture. Associate producer, Bryan Foy; screen play by Crane Wilbur; from a play by Porter Emerson Browne; directed by John Farrow; assistant director, Marshall Hageman; photographer, Lu O'Connell, A.S.C.; film editor, Frank Dewar; dialogue director, Jo Graham; art director, Max Parker; gowns by Howard Shoup; technical advisor, Tommy Gubbins. Casts Boris Karloff, Beverly Roberts, Ricardo Cortez, Gordon Oliver, Sheila Bromley, Vladimir Sokoloff, Gordon Hart, Richard Loo, Douglas Wood, Chester Gan, Luke Chan, Selmer Jackson, James B. Leong, Tetsu Komai, Eddie Lee, Maurice Lui, Mia Ichioaka.

GOOD atmosphere and some sharply drawn and colortule characterizations make of War Lord an entertaining program picture. The sense of insecurity of life and property and of the evolution of a new social order in China is well gotten across. And so graphic is the picture's description of life in both Shanghai and a rural province that it is highly instructive. John Farrow has done a creditable job of directing, building his situations effectively and keeping good movement in the story. An especially pleasing touch was the quiet speech of all the players in the gloom of the railway station at the opening of the story, which gave a foreboding air to the piece.

Boris Karloff, as the General Wu Yen Tong, leader of bandit forces, who holds a group of Americans captive in a missionary settlement of a small town in a remote province, gives his most attractive and probably his most subtle characterization in this picture. He displays a wonder of a make-up, his eyebrows arched high over a convincingly swarthy skin and the corners of his eyes securely pulled back, presumably with adhesive tape. It remains consistent throughout the picture too, which is

not always the happy lot of oriental make-ups. Whether Karloff's General Tong characterization will hold water under the stress of close analysis is a matter of some doubt. Certainly he seems remarkably poised and intelligent for a man so soon come up from the ranks of the coolies, and it would seem that the general has acquired some mannerisms of deportment and speech which smack strongly of the occident. But perhaps I simply don't know my China. At any rate, for theatrical purposes Karloff's characterization is wholly effective. It is filled with colorful paradoxes and emotional contrasts, all skillfully realized by the actor, and it is rich in humor. A good deal of the humor grows out of the general's regard for American gangster tactics.

HE fact that the story, taken from a play by Porter Emerson Browne, does not quite "jell" is due principally to the fact that our interest is diverted too frequently between the activities of the various characters. Too many things happen. The result is that we do not become firmly interested in any of the characters, and are not enough concerned with what happens to them, which dissipates suspense. Too, the ending comes about rather abruptly, without a sufficient climax having been attained.

At the beginning of this film again are to be seen the meaningless and inartistic news reel shots which so frequently mar pictures with a foreign locale. In a review of Last Train From Madrid (Spectator, June 19) I analyzed at some length the reasons why I find these news reel shots objectionable in film stories. Suffice to say that the mood of this story, indeed the story itself, begins only after these shots are concluded and the camera begins to tell its story in theatrical terms.

Outstanding in the cast is Vladimir Sokoloff, playing an assassinated government general. He knows mood, is sensitive to character shadings, and is altogether an excellent actor. We hope to see more of him. Beverly Roberts plays with assurance, though she is not well cast as the missionary girl. Ricardo Cortez is pleasantly subtle, and Gordon Oliver performs his heroics with a good command of mechanics. Shiela Bromley brings a distinctive manner to the performance of her jaded lady, and was likeable. Among the other players, who are too numerous to mention individually, Richard Loo was amusing as an officer in Karloff's army, with his sepulchral promptings of his superior on the best American gangster slang.

Tuneful But Incredible

THE SINGING MARINE, Warners. Executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Lou Edelman; director, Ray Enright; dance director, Busby Berkeley; original screen play, Delmer Daves; music and lyrics, Harry Warren and Al Dubin; added lyric, NIGHT OVER SHANGHAI, Johnny Mercer; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; arrangements, Ray Heindorf; photographer, Arthur L. Todd; dialogue director, Gene Lewis; gowns, Orry-Kelly; assistant director, Jess Hibbs. Cast: Dick Powell, Doris Weston, Hugh Herbert, Lee Dixon, Jane Darwell, Allen Jenkins, Larry Adler, Marcia Ralston, Big Boy Williams, Veda Ann Borg, Jane Wyman, Berton Churchill, Eddie Acuff, Henry O'Neill, Addison Richards, James Robbins, Miki Orita, Tetsu Komai.

As you may have surmised, the brave men and true (well—reasonably) of the Marines are the background for this musical film, and their carryings on, to-

gether with their singular adeptness at song and tripping the light fantastic, create good entertainment, if you are

not a stickler for credibility in a story.

It all begins when Dick Powell's maritime buddies take up a collection and send him to New York to participate in an amateur radio contest, accompanied by a comely miss from San Diego, also a contestant, who at the crucial moment can produce only trepidation before the microphone and must content herself with becoming secretary to her companion, upon whom fame and fortune descends immediately. The latter understandingly loses his equilibrium a bit, failing to make an expected call on some fellow Marines in Brooklyn, and when he returns to his ship, which is sailing for Shanghai, his pals outdo themselves at misunderstanding-in fact, they are geniuses at it—and the rift grows deeper and deeper. In Shanghai, where his agents have followed him, in order to present "The Singing Marine" on an international huck-up and to establish him in a night club, the rift grows even deeper, until at last he throws up his career to become a pal again to his buddies. The chump.

Warren and Dubin provided some tuneful songs for the show, outstanding of which are "I Know Now," sung appealingly by Doris Weston, and the infectious "Just Because My Baby Says It's So," sung by practically everybody, and almost constantly by Hugh Herbert. "Night Over Shanghai" is somewhat too suggestive of "I've Got You Under My Skin" for my approbation.

DIRECTOR Ray Enright has kept the piece moving at a sprightly pace, and has made full use of every opportunity for laughs. The production numbers, staged by Busby Berkeley, are elaborate in the best Warner Brothers fashion, and for the most part are cleverly conceived and executed, though one or two become a trifle tedious.

Dick Powell is a painfully girl-shy, kicking-his-toe-in-the-ground kid during the first portion of the picture, and not only gets away with it, but evokes considerable appeal, a fact which might be suggestive to the Brethren Warner in choosing his future parts. This one at least is a great improvement on the egotistical drug store cowboy roles he has played so frequently in the past. Unfortunately his juvenility is lost with amazing rapidity in The Singing Marine, a single month of success in New York and the wiles of a torrid movie actress apparently working wonders.

MOST of the comedy is contributed by Hugh Herbert, who is immensely funny as the nit-witted agent, his fluttering hands and falsetto ejaculations keeping the audience hilarious throughout most of his scenes at the performance at which I was present. A highlight of the picture was his brief appearance as his sister, with blond wig, long eyelashes, highly arched lips.

Doris Weston showed a pleasing personality and sang pleasantly. Jane Darwell, Allen Jenkins, Marcia Ralston and Addison Richards were competent. Lee Dixon, with his usual buoyancy, performs one dance, and could

have performed two to good effect.

Larry Adler is, most dexterous in drawing a wide variety of musical sounds from the harmonica, sometimes with tuneful results, sometimes too loudly.

Love According to Fancy

LOVE IN A BUNGALOW, Universal. Directed by Raymond B. McCarey; associate producer, E. M. Asher; screen play by Austin Parker, Karen DeWolf and James Mulhauser; original story by Eleanore Griffin and William Rankin; photographer, Milton Krasner, A.S.C.; film editors, Bernard W. Burton and Irving Brinbaum; musical director, Charles Previn; production designed by John Harkrider; associates (sets), Scollard Maas, (frocks), Vera West; sound, William Fox and Edwin Wetzel. Cast: Nan Grey, Kent Taylor, Jack Smart, Hobart Cavanaugh, Richard Carle, Louise Beavers, Margaret McWade, Marjorie Main, Minerva Urecal, Florence Lake, Jerry Tucker, Joan Howard and Joan Breslau.

THE setting for Love in a Bungalow, which is the background for the whole story, is a model bungalow, and it is the gayest, whitest, most bizarre creation to be seen in some time. Within and about this airy dream-house takes place a tale with an engaging novelty-the real estate agent's hostess falls in love with a young ne'er-dowell whom she finds helping himself to a bed one morning, the two write a letter for a radio contest offering \$5000 for the nation's happiest married couple, win the prize, and are then faced with the problem of providing a happy home and children for the inspection of the donors of the prize. The story is told in a breezy style, and with grace and charm, but it just misses its mark because of irrelevancies in the story, which result in a lack of proportion and emphasis in the plot structure. There is also too much talk, and the film slows up noticeably in spots. A more frequent use of music would help a great deal to carry the film along.

Raymond B. McCarey has given excellent direction to the picture. He demands an economy and precision of movement from his players which could well serve as a model for many another magaphone wielder. He also evidences a keen sense of humor in his handling of the

scenes.

NAN GREY is most attractive and has the promise of a distinctive style in her playing, but in this part she reveals signs of inexperience—emotional transitions just a bit too abrupt, frequently a lack of thorough motivation behind what she says or does. The influence of the director upon her is sometimes rather plainly evident, the actress not having quite gotten the knack of completely losing herself in a character, and of being intuitively motivated by that character. Miss Grey shows a great deal of promise, however, as I have said, and it is perhaps unfortunate at this stage of her career that she should be obliged to bite off a bit more than she could chew. Kent Taylor is pleasantly whimsical and easy in his part, though I do not think he has exhausted its possibilities. I doubt very much if his little mustache is one of his acting assets.

Jack Smart is an amusing Babbitt, and Richard Carle is capital as the complacent donor Bisbee. The amiable complete revolution of his head as a departing gesture was fetching. A comedy highspot of the picture is the carryings on of Margaret McWade and Marjorie Main, the two maiden Bisbee sisters, one of whom is deaf. Florence Lake is funny, though her part in the early portion of the picture was one of the irrelevant elements.

The production was designed by John Harkrider, with Scollard Maas as an associate worker on the setting.

Trenchant Commentary

HOOSIER SCHOOLBOY, Monogram Pictures. Associate producer, Ken Goldsmith; directed by William Nigh; screen play, Robert Lee Johnson; photographed by Paul Ivano, A.S.C.; technical director, E. R. Hickson; recorded by Glenn Rominger; film editor, Roy Livingston; assistant director, Michael Eason; musical director, Abe Meyers. Cast: Mickey Rooney, Anne Nagel, Frank Shields, Edward Pawley, William Gould, Dorothy Vaughan, Anita Denniston, Harry Hayden, Bradley Metcalf, Doris Rankin, Walter Long, Helena Grant, Cecil Weston, Mary Field, Zita Moulton, Fred A. Kelsey.

Twould seem that Monogram Pictures is serious in its avowal to place upon the market a higher type of independent film. This one not only provides good entertainment, but it goes in for no little social commentary, taking some trenchant pokes at the meanness of small town life, with its gossip, intolerance, and class distinction, and airing as well the conflicting views of capital and labor as they feature in a milk strike. The whole social set-up is viewed with the level eye of the journalist. Some of the scenes are so human that more than once the spectator finds a catch in his throat.

Mickey Rooney, who stars, makes a touching little figure of the boy he plays, the youngster who lives on the wrong side of the tracks. Bristle-haired, resentful, his good qualities hidden beneath a superficial toughness, the result of a defense mechanism set up against the hurts he has had at the hands of those who won't understand, the character brings to our minds with vividness some youngster of the same type from our own school days, and induces us to look back at him from our vantage point of greater experience and view him with greater charity. Mickey's scenes with the understanding young school teacher, and with his father, a drunken shell-shocked war hero, scenes which so easily could have curdled into sentimentality, are directed by William Nigh with admirable restraint and insight.

The story develops consistantly, the social commentary being strung unobtrusively along the main thread of action, and builds to a strong climax. It is probable that the young school teacher effects, her reforms with a little too much dispatch, and there are other incidents in the story which seem a bit arbitrary, such as the youngster's encouraging his father to drive the milk truck through the picket blockade when the boy must have known that his teacher and the dairy owner's son favored the striking farmers; but these incidents far from invalidate the force of the film.

ANNE NAGEL exhibits many of the attributes of a fine actress in her performance of the young teacher—a rich and flexible voice, poise, emotional depth, and intelligence. She should progress far in pictures. Sadly overshadowed by her playing is Frank Shields, who reflects inexperience and, I should say, a lack of imagination. His gestures are awkward and he handles lines with little shading. Fortunately he is a good type for the part, and his few important scenes are with considerably better actors, so that his presence in the film is no very great detraction.

Edward Pawley does excellent trouping as the former war hero, realizing expertly the contrasting facets of the character. His style is singularly suggestive of that of Lionel Barrymore. Dorothy Vaughan gives a neat performance as the school principal, and two of the children, Anita Denniston and Bradley Metcalf are good. The character women in the boarding house scene are much too broad—would be in the Hollywood Bowl—and are unfortunately a jarring note in the picture.

The photography is first-rate throughout. A particularly striking scene was the soft-toned one of the train approaching in semi-darkness, its headlight fused into the rest of the picture but dominating it like a twilight moon. Paul Ivano filmed it. Ken Goldsmith, associate producer, is to be commended for his handling of the production.

Neither Fish Nor Fowl

WINDJAMMER, Radio picture and RKO release. George A. Hirliman production. Stars George O'Brien. Associate producer, David Howard; directed by Ewing Scott; original story by Major Raoul Haig; screen play by Dan Jarrett and James Gruen; photographed by Frank B. Goode; recorded by W. C. Moore; film editor, Robert Crandall; art director, Frank Sylos; musical direction by Abe Meyer. Supporting cast: Constance Worth, William Hall, Gavin Gordon, Brandon Evans, Lal Chand Mehra, Ben Hendricks, Lee Shumway, Stanley Blystone, Frank Hagney. Running time, 58 minutes.

GEORGE O'BRIEN, one of our outstanding heroes, according to the best tradition, can be impressively stern and righteous, brave, jocund, or furious; but he errs in trying to be whimsical or arch. Subtlety is not his forte. In justice to O'Brien, of course, it should be said that the nifties he is called upon to mouth in Windjammer inherently are not always convulsing. They are doubtless provided by the scriptists, as a step in making of the hero a very clever fellow, as per the formula for action films, but the story's being set against a background of the social uppercrust, with whom the audience associates a higher level of repartee, somehow places O'Brien's verbal "lulus", as well as much of his general deportment, at a disadvantage.

The actor plays a young attorney who conspires to board a yacht engaged in a race to Honolulu, in order to serve the wealthy owner with a court supoena, and from then on our hero is simply too clever for words, getting in gibes on the slightest provocation, even though put at menial labor for his passages, rising to the occasion and manning the yacht almost single handed when the crew deserts it in a storm, and finally effecting a rescue of the Commodore and his party, including his beautiful daughter, from the clutches of a piratic captain holding them prisoner on his barge.

There is one good fight in the picture, and considerable suspense is contrived, but the heavy emphasis on "society" detracts from the picture's success as an action film. Of course, the fact that O'Brien spends much of his time showing up the socialites as an ineffectual lot may give some gratification to the "five-and-ten" audiences who ultimately will make the film profitable. My opinion, how ever, is that the "five-and-teners" would like better a little more rough-and-ready action. And as far as the more discriminating audiences are concerned, they will not find the mirroring of "society" very credible. This confusion

of genres makes of the picture a sort of hybrid, neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring.

ON the credit side of the production are some fine shots of the contesting yachts under sail, caught by Cinematographer Frank B. Goode. No spectacle of nature or man makes a more graceful camera study than a billowing sailboat. Also on the credit side is William Hall, who, as the outlaw Captain Morgan, comes perilously close to taking the picture away from our hero. Some of his leering villainy is a bit overdone, but on the whole he plays with notable authority and conviction. Too, he boasts a burly, commanding voice, and a physique which dominates the camera.

Constance Worth reflects experience in her work, and she is likeable, albeit she is not always attractively lighted. Brandon Evans, the Commodore, is as bigoted and stupid as he is supposed to be, and Gavin Gordon uses his chief asset, poise, for all it is worth in performing another of his pussy-foot gentlemen. Among those doing competent work in small parts are Lal Chand Mehra, Ben Hendricks, Frank Hagney, and Sam Flint. Ewing Scott directed.

Unsustained Satire

SUPER SLEUTH, R.K.O. Producer, Edward Small; director, Ben Stoloff; play, Harry Segall; screen play, Gertrude Purcell and Ernest Pagano; photographer, Joseph H. August; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; film editor, Kenny Holmes. Cast: Jack Oakie, Ann Sothern, Eduardo Ciannelli, Alan Bruce, Edgar Kennedy, Joan Woodbury, Bradley Page, Paul Guilfoyle, Willie Best, William Corson, Alec Craig, Richard Lane, Paul Hurst, George Rosener, Fred Kelsey, Robert E. O'Connor, Philip Morris, Dick Rush.

SATIRICAL viewpoint is the saving grace of this A film. The story, a comedy-mystery affair adapted by Gertrude Purcell and Ernest Pagano from a play by Harry Segall, has a good plot but it gets out of hand and goes violently slapstick toward the end. Moreover, there are manifested throughout the film numerous signs of haste, carelessness, and indifference in production. Hollywood is the locale and the movie star Bill Martin, played by Jack Oakie, famed for being a super sleuth in his pictures, undertakes to track down a "poison pen" writer in competition with the police, a feat which, though incurring several hazardous risks to his person, needless to say he ultimately accomplishes, with the aid of extraordinarily good luck. A peculiar feature of the film is that the audience knows the identity of the mysterious criminal all along.

The most interesting aspect of the picture is its portrayal of the behind-the-scenes activities of Hollywood. There is an amusing frankness in the film's revelation of the intimacy of the workers in a studio, and the far from awe-inspiring position held by an actor on the lot. In these studio scenes Director Ben Stoloff has gotten some cleverness.

ACK OAKIE again performs in his usual loose style, as though he were "emceeing" a vaudeville show, sometimes being very funny through sheer ability at mimicry, sometimes missing his points by a wide margin. Ann

Sothern has nothing very exacting to do, but does it competently. Eduardo Ciannelli is effectively sinister as the murderous "poison pen" writer. Edgar Kennedy still gets laughs with his old bag of tricks as the police lieutenant. Alan Bruce was pleasing in a small part, and Joan Woodbury and Bradley Page also lent good support.

The jerky final shot of Oakie and Miss Sothern, seated on a trap settee, being whisked in and out of the wall, first their feet and then their heads uppermost, all the while engrossed in amour, was offensive and silly and by all

means should be cut.

IS IT ACTING?

By Gene Lockhart

IN a quiet corner on the set, the Character Actor sat reading a copy of the Hollywood Spectator. As his eyes followed the persuasive path of Mr. Beaton's phrases the Young Actor ambled over, straddled a chair, pointed to the Only Magazine Devoted to the Screen as an Art, and remarked, "He says that stage training is not necessary to success on the screen."

The Character Actor nodded.

"He says that personalities are more important than trained actors."

"Yes?"

"He says that the screen is not an acting art."

"So I understand."

"He also says that it's an art of the projection of personality."

The Character Actor closed his copy of Hollywood's oldest film publication and studied the handsome, wavy-haired Young Actor. "How long have you been in motion pictures?"

"Over seven months."

"Ah, it's a pleasant feeling."

"What is?"

"To have your option taken up. Have you had any stage experience?"

"Sure. I was in two plays at college. That's how they discovered me."

"Mm! I understand that the studio has decided to make you a star."

"Well, I'm playing the lead in this picture."

"And playing it nicely."

"Thanks. Of course this part is sort of easy for me, being the part of a fellow just out of college. I'm just playing myself. They say I'm a personality."

"I see."

"Later on I'm going to get to play character parts, I hope; but you haven't told me what you think of Mr. Beaton's remarks."

"Well, the proof of one of his remarks is self-evident."

"Which one is that?"

"That stage training is not necessary to success on the screen."

"If you mean me I guess you're right; of course, I don't know yet what it's all about. They tell me to look like this, speak like that and I keep on doing it till they get what they want."

"Yes?"

"But I feel I need training of some kind."

"Aren't you getting it? You're being trained for the screen and getting paid for it, so obviously Mr. Beaton is correct; stage training is not necessary to gain success on the screen."

"Then I guess Mr. Beaton is right when he says that personalities are more important than trained actors."

"More important to whom?"

"To the producers, I suppose."
"What kind of personalities?"

"The kind that appeal to audiences."

How many principals are there in this picture?"

"About fifteen."

"How many of them are 'personalities'?"

"Well, there's myself, the girl I play with, and that fellow with the funny accent."

"And the other twelve who support you and the young

lady?"

"They're just actors."

"Quite right. Like myself, they're just actors; do you know their names?"

"Some of them. The actress who plays the part of the old grandmother is Beulah Bondi, the fellow who plays the old Swede is Walter Brennan, the nervous professor is Walter Kingsford, and then there are Frank Morgan, Jessie Ralph, Elizabeth Risdon, Fay Bainter..."

"An all-star Belasco cast."

"Eh?"

"Forgive me. I was thinking of other days."

"But these people are not the same off the screen, so what they do on the screen must be acting."

"It would seem so."

"But Mr. Beaton says there is no such thing as an art of acting in motion pictures."

"It's an interesting point of view."

"What do you think?"

"I believe there is a technique of acting for the screen, just as there is for the stage."

"Then what is it? What's the difference between stage

acting and screen acting?"

"Did you ever see a person paint a poster?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever see a person paint a miniature?"

"Yes."

"What was the difference in method?"

"Why, the poster was painted with broad strokes and the miniature was painted with delicate touches."

"To my mind, that is the difference between stage and screen acting."

"I see. But what about this 'projection of personality'? Does Mr. Beaton mean somebody like Jimmy Durante?"

"I doubt it."

"Mae West?"

"I hardly think so."

"But they're personalities; they both project."

"True; they project something, but not what Mr. Beaton has in mind—unless I do him an injustice."

"Well, how do you project your personality?"

"I'm afraid my opinion on the matter is based upon my training as an actor with which Mr. Beaton does not agree."

"As a stage actor?"

"Yes, and also as a screen actor."

"I'm listening."

"Thank you. You remember the song, 'Every Little Movement Has a Meaning All It's Own'?"

"No."

"Mm! Well, this morning you were in a drawingroom scene; you stood talking to the charming young heroine, trying to make an impression on her?"

"Yes?"

"To project that sort of personality?"

"Yes."

"You stood with your feet spread wide apart and your hands behind your back?"

"Yes, that's a habit of mine."

"The director corrected you."

"Yes, but why did he? That's me. That's my personality."

"I agree. But was it the personality you should project on the screen if the audience is to accept you as a smart young college man making love to a charming girl?"

"I get it."

"It seems to me that what Mr. Beaton means by 'projection of personality' is placing upon the screen the personality of the character one is playing with sufficient naturalness and clarity, to be convincing."

"What do you mean by naturalness?"

"Just that."

"You mean that I must learn lines, learn business, and then perform them for the camera just as naturally as I'm talking to you?"

"If that's the sort of part it is, yes."

"But that's acting."

"Of a sort."

"But it's mighty hard for me to be natural and at the same time think of lines and business."

"All young actors have that difficulty, but in time you will become a trained screen actor and those obstacles will disappear."

"What do you mean by a trained screen actor?"

"Simply that you will learn the technique of acting on the screen just as a stage actor learns the technique of acting on the stage."

"Well, another question. What do you mean by 'clarity'?"

"Do you remember the scene you played this morning with two other actors? It was a long shot, and you were in the center."

"I remember."

"As they talked you turned your head from one to the other several times."

"Yes, just as I would do naturally."

"Then the director took a close-up of you."

"Yes, and he told me not to move my head; just move my eyes."

"That is screen technique. If you had done in the close-up what you naturally felt like doing there would be too much head movement in the close-up on the screen. The thought you wanted to project would have been confused by unnecessary head movement."

"I see. So that is clarity."
"One form of clarity."

"Then I don't do what is natural for me to do!"

"You make it appear as if it were natural."

"But if, as Mr. Beaton says, the screen is not an acting art, why can't I do what I wish? Why do I have to keep my head still in a close-up?"

"It helps you to do what charming Mr. Beaton calls

'projecting your personality'."

"Now, I'm ga-ga; well, another thing, do you remember that long speech I had yesterday, the one with the seventeen takes?"

"When you were angry and told the girl what you thought of her?"

"Yes. I still don't know why the director made me do it so many times."

"You arrived at your climax, vocally and emotionally, too soon. You had nothing left for the finish."

"But I was mad at her. I felt that way."

"True, but that was a speech which, as we say, had to be built up. It is one of the first rules one learns."

"Rules of what?"
"Of acting."

"Oh! But I wouldn't feel natural doing it that way."

"That's probably because you have not had much experience in reading long speeches."

"You mean there's a technique in speaking lines even before the camera?"

"Ask any director."

"Then the screen does demand that a person know how

"Again I suggest that you ask any director. Do you remember Luise Rainer's telephone conversation in The Great Ziegfeld?"

"Yes."

"That scene should prove to you that technique in acting is necessary on the screen."

"Well, now I'm scared stiff."

"What about?"

"My next picture."

"Why?"

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"I see."

"Now I can't play myself because my manners are too modern."

"Then you must characterize."

"Sure, but how? How does a fellow take snuff, how does he handle his handkerchieef, how does he walk?"

"My young friend, all those things are part of the repertoire of a trained actor, whether he appears on the screen or on the stage, but your director will teach you."

"Well then, the screen must be an acting art."

"Certainly; the screen is an acting art for those who have the ability to make it so. If you want proof, study the performances of trained actors: Beulah Bondi in Make Way for Tomorrow; Adolphe Menjou in Cafe Metropole, notice how with a look or a half-turn he builds a line for a laugh without sacrificing character; Helen Westley in the same picture; Joseph Schildkraut in The Garden of Allah; Frank Morgan and Charles Ruggles in any of their pictures; these, and many more trained actors whom I could name should prove to you that the screen is an acting art; that the camera is kind to the actor who thinks in character and deadly to the actor who merely recites memorized lines."

"Well, I'm going to write Mr. Beaton a letter and

ask him what he thinks of your point of view."

"Please don't."

"Why not?"

"Let him enjoy his vacation; let him enjoy his roses; let him enjoy his belief that the screen is not an acting art; and while he is thus occupied, young people like yourself, with the help of director and cutting room, will still go on projecting your personalities and trained actors will, I hope, still go on supporting you by just acting!"

The Young Actor unstraddled himself, waved his hand and strolled away. As he went, the Character Actor murmured to himself: "Suit the action to the word; the word to the action, with this special observance, that

you o'erstep not the modesty of nature!"



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TREATMENT of IMAGINATIVE SOUNDS

By Edward Le Veque

IT could safely be said that sound film recording has reached very near mechanical perfection. This is specially true in Hollywood and in our major studios in particular. There is no sound audible to the human ear that sound technicians cannot reproduce with incredible fidelity; in fact, among other marvels, they have given us the illusion of third dimensional sound, so that voices appear to advance or receed together with the moving characters on the screen. Thus what I have to say should not reflect upon the sound men who merely take orders and who, with masterly precision, deliver whatever job is entrusted to their care.

Sound affects us in two ways—intellectually and physically—and because the motion picture industry has not yet stumbled upon this truth, glaring blunders, detrimental to the illusion of reality, are constantly being committed. For convenience, we shall name one type of physical sounds and one of mental sounds.

Physical sounds are those sounds which thrill our nerves, as when we hear scraping or filing upon iron; while mental sounds are of an abstract nature; their appeal is to the imagination, and leave undisturbed the nervous system. On the mental side are the aesthetic sounds—harmonious noises of nature, melodious voices and, of course, music. However, music can be separated into two extreme camps within this mental sphere: music that elevates the soul, inspires us to high ideals, and music that stirs the savage within us. This last type of music transgresses the borders of physical noises.

THE screen, today, is suffering from an overdose of physical noises; sounds are reproduced so life-like that the screeching of taxicab breaks tear the living tissues from your nerves, exactly like the skidding screeches of the taxicab that nearly ran you down before you walked into the show. One goes to shows to forget, but the screen never lets you forget the noisy world outside. I don't mean that the screen should be gagged. Sound is here to stay, so we might as well strain its nerve-wracking properties and make it amenable to our sensibilities.

To give the public unadulterated screeching sounds is

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barbarous, not to say costly, since sensitive persons stay away from shows because of it. For years I have made it a point to inquire from most everyone I meet, his or her reactions to nerve-wracking noises in pictures, and for everyone who doesn't mind them there are six who do. Such sounds are defended on the grounds of realism, but a little analysis should explode this belief.

To begin with, we do not see flesh and blood people upon the screen, but shadows in various degrees of greyness which our imagination clothes with the concreteness of life. Thus, for shadows to emit sounds is an anachronism, a mixture of the real and the ethereal which has the tendency to destroy whatever illusion of realism the shadows have provided. That is why in the early days of sound it was a startling novelty to see photographs talking. The intellect had to be adjusted to this incredibility, which, in the end, it has learned to take for granted, just as long ago it has learned to accept the darkened auditorium. Switch the light suddenly and, although the picture may still be seen with clarity, there is a period of mental disturbance until the light becomes part of the procedure at hand.

SOUND is now part of the procedure of viewing pictures, a fact which our intellect no longer questions; however, sound should be handled so as not to prove a

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disturbing factor, and thus make us conscious that we are merely watching a motion picture when we should be entirely oblivious of the medium which has transplanted us to the land of drama.

Jarring noises destroy all attempts at realism since they call attention to themselves as annoyingly as if the person sitting next to you kept elbowing you on the ribs. And to believe that excruciating sounds are not injurious to the nervous system, is to overlook the fact that our army hospitals are still full with shell-shocked patients, the victims of brutal sounds beyond their endurance to withstand.

Now, since our imagination can give reality to grey shadows, it can also attribute life-like qualities to noises which suggest the real ones. The stage has presented accordionists, guitarists, cornetists, etc., who, with surprising realism, have imitated life-like sounds more stimulating to the imagination than the real sounds. Thus, they have shown us the way to destill the nerve-jarring properties of physical noises and leave merely their essence; in other words, physical sounds can be transformed into mental sounds through the aid of music. I don't mean by this that there should be a sustained musical score throughout the entire picture; some pictures, of course, may be enhanced by such a device, while others may suffer from it. Every picture is an entirely different identity, and each needs its own special treatment. However, every picture will be enhanced if its nerve-jarring noises are eliminated.

MUSIC and LYRICS for

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WARREN LOW

Film Editor

"The Life of Emile Zola"

3

%

"The Life of Emile Zola"

Story by

HEINZ HERALD

AND

GEZA HERCZEG

Screenplay by

GEZA HERCZEG

AND
HEINZ HERALD*

*in Collaboration

%

35

DUT why haven't we vet delved into the realm of **B** imaginative sound? Simply because we have straightjacketed ourselves to one standard formula which the whole industry has accepted as final: That everything visible on the screen must be heard, and that when a character speaks all background noises must drop in volume so that it may not drown the dialogue. In the days when silent pictures were changing from knee-pants to long ones, photography had also been reduced to a simple formula: intense light for comedies and less light for dramas. Everybody connected with production knew by heart that it took so many domes, so many spot-lights and so many broadsides for a set of such and such dimensions. There was not such a thing as imaginative photography with its various tricks of lights and shadows to convey any mood desired. It was raw, unretouched photography, just as our sound is today raw, unretouched sound lacking in nuances to convey the various moods in conformity with the action.

Visual moods can be intensified by means of imaginative sounds; for example: An excursion train is about to start with a load of happy mirthful children. At the station, bidding them good-bye, are the parents as delighted as their offspring. To convey this mood, the locomotive's tooting should be as melodiously gay as the mirth within the coaches. Later, the excursion meets with disaster, and the parents, with heavy hearts, await the train's return. If before, the train's whistle was gay, now that the mood has changed to sadness, it should be as mournful as the atmosphere which permeates the scene.

HE nature of another story demands that the audience should share the inner feelings of a crippled, sweet old lady who passes the time rocking herself in a chair; thus when she reads a letter that animates her with joy, the creaking of the chair should be as melodious as the gigglings of the frollicsome angels; if an injustice arouses her anger, the chair's creacking should be dry and harsh, but at no time nerve-jarring; if sad in her loneliness, it should suggest murmurs of doleful weeping.

If, in the first example, a raw, life-like, every-day locomotive's tooting were to do service for both—the gay and the sad scene—the whistle would be meaningless as far as the mood is concerned. So would be the same monotonous creaking of a rocker as background for three

distinct phases of feeling.

It surprised me that, when I discussed the idea of imaginative sounds with some one identified with production, although this person saw its possibilities and agreed with me on every point, he argued that it was not altogether feasible of accomplishment. The mike, he explained, picks up all noises within its range, and if some of these noises are of the unwanted kind, how then could they be erased so as to leave only the pleasant ones? Apparently he forgot that most background noises are added days after the scenes have been filmed, since the mike, which is trained principally upon the actors, registers background noises very faintly or none at all, and these sounds have to be added afterwards; also that many scenes in which there is no dialogue are shot silent, and footsteps, doors banging, brake-screechings, etc., are dubbed afterwards.

BACKGROUND noises for background's sake, and without direct relation to the story, often detract from those which have a significance to the story. Such was the case in a scene in which the tick-tock of an office wall clock lost its dominant emphasis because it became merely part of the background noises, such as the clattering of typewriters and the filtering street murmurs; thus what could have been a dramatic sound punch was obscured by constant background noises. It would have been far more effective if these noises had gradually faded away, since the character, who was presented subjectively, had his attention fixed upon the tick-tocks, and these could have grown louder and louder as the tension became greater.

Reducing the volume of background noises to permit the dialogue to be heard is a mechanical adjustment that draws attention to itself. Most incidental noises should be left to the imagination. After all, our imagination is able to supply sound; it did so in silent pictures, even to the right mood. Our heroines had beautiful voices, while those of the villains fitted their alcoholic breaths and

long black mustaches.

REMEMBER the disillusionment of movie fans when their favorites first spoke from the screen? I once saw a silent picture in which a judge passed a death sentence. The illusion was so well sustained that it seemed as though I heard his ominous voice pronouncing the sentence, while the pounding of his gavel upon the desk resounded as if he were nailing the coffin.

Just a riddle. A scene shows us a girl walking out of a hotel lobby. As it is customary, immediately street noises assail our ears. Perhaps this is as it should be if the girl has just arrived from the mountain fastness of Arkansas and, naturally, is acutely aware of all strange city noises. But suppose the girl has lived in a big city ever since her first wails in a maternity ward. She certainly is seasoned to city noises so that she would have to stop and strain her ears to tell them apart, unless there was a parade of bellowing bulls pounding upon the pavement. The question is: Shall in both instances background noises be treated alike?

CAs Others Comment

As An Exhibitor Sees Them

FOR some time there has been in the pile of papers I dig into at intervals, a letter from an British Columbia exhibitor. As I read it over, it seems to me it should be of interest to Hollywood. Here it is:

I agree with what you said in regard to it being a farce to vote on the BEST picture of the year, as comparisons are impossible in such varied subjects as, say, San Francisco and These Three. My list would not agree with yours quite, but I'd certainly put the two mentioned high. San Francisco only did a little below Mutiny with me, and These Three was a gorgeous flop. For best performances I'd vote Jeanette MacDonald in San Francisco, a most difficult and trying part, marvelously sustained. Clark Gable's couldn't be bettered but it was a "gift" for him. For the same reason I mentioned, I'd place little Marcia Mae Jones second in honors; no one else seemed to have noticed her, all plumping for Bonita Gran-

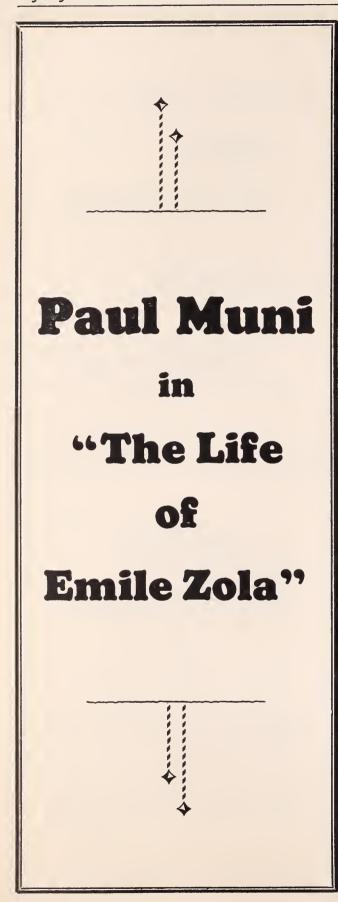
Costumes by
Milo
Anderson

"The Life
of
Emile Zola"

JOSEPH SCHILDKRAUT

~.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus
in
"The Life of Emile Zola"



ville, whose part, though her performance was excellent, was comparatively easy; but the former kid had an awful load to carry and did it superbly. Other pictures high on my list are Showboat (next best musical to Marietta, I consider), tho it did poor business here.

Nine Days a Queen (new low at B. O. for 15 months! I'm ashamed of my people to say), Fauntleroy, Rhodes (fair at B. O.), Big Bright Eyes (flop), Captain Blood (flop), Escapade (flop), but did better when I insisted on a repeat—Abdul the Damned (flop); so you see if I picked pictures to suit my taste, I'd starve quickly. When I review successes here, I'm amazed and consider I know absolutely nothing about my business. Apalling stuff like Let's Sing Again did well—radio publicity, I suppose.

There's one angle I'd like you to think about. Trailers. I know it must be a problem for producers. I buy them all, censor them, and reject 50% as being more likely to do harm than good. I've so often heard patrons say, "Well, I would have gone but the 'preview' (meaning trailer) put me off." I consider that a muddle of shots from coming pictures, as most trailers are, only confuse and leave no vivid impression, especially as 50% of them are love-clinches, at which my place little Marca Mae Jones second in honors; no one else lines of Wm. Powell's and Luise Rainer's out of character speeches, as shown at conclusion of Escapade, a confidential chat to the public as to the part they are going to play. It would rivet more attention. What think you?

I did much better last year, due almost entirely to bank nights, which says little for the public's desire for pictures as such. Now the police have shut down on bank nights, I'm where I was in 1935 and yet everyone is earning wages. The industry means little to the public. It is apathetic.

GEOFFREY G. BAISS

When Sound Proved a Failure

Dear Mr. Beaton:

Congratulations on your splendid discussion on Color and Sound in the Spectator of June 19. I doubt that it dents the super-morons in Hollywood, but it is true. In fact, I found out a lot of things about sound effects 30 years ago while pounding the piano in a movie in an Ohio town. We had an effect man back of the screen and he was good. He didn't miss anything. He was quite a sensation and draw for about a month. Then the patrons got to kidding him and we decided to do without sound effects. Of course our sound effects as a background against actors whose talking could be seen but not heard, were a different matter than the cinema of today. However, the psychology was somewhat the same. Sound effects today are reduced to a formula, crickets for a night in the country and loud music for main titles.

It is too bad that radio hasn't its Welford Beaton. In general I think that the pictures, as bad and dumb as a lot of them are, are way ahead of the radio as regards showmanship. I listened to a few programs today and such abortions most of them were.

But how about this Television? The big companies are spending the stockholders' money aplenty. Let us grant it is perfected and there are plenty of sets in use and sponsors are interested. What are they going to televise? Performers reading from a script? What will the picture producers have to say about televising films?

The Central Casting episode in A Star Is Born bringing out the 1 in 100,000 chance of breaking in the movies, was quite impressive to the audiences I am sure. But the sad part to me was to see Peggy Wood in that bit. I knew Peggy when she lived with her aunt at the Elmsford at Eighth Avenue and 49th Street in New York. She had a small part in The Madcap Duchess. Then she traveled far, ever so far. Now she is back where she started. Life is such a tragedy after all unless you have a sense of humor.—J. B. W., Hollywood.

WILLIAM DIETERLE

Directed

"The Life of Emile Zola"

HENRY BLANKE

Associate Producer

'THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA'

Previous Releases

CALL IT A DAY

ANTHONY ADVERSE

LOUIS PASTEUR

WHITE ANGEL

GREEN PASTURES

PETRIFIED FOREST

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Hollywood 10 CENTS SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Twelfth Year

Los Angeles, California—September 18, 1937

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MR. ZUKOR MAKES IMPORTANT DISCOVERY
WHEN A FILM CRITIC MAY BE CRITICIZED
IMPROVED METHOD OF RECORDING MUSIC
OUR SYMPATHY GOES TO ROBERT TAYLOR
STAGE CANNOT COMPETE WITH THE SCREEN
HOW MANY PICTURES SHOULD STARS MAKE?
ONE SAM GOLDWYN IDEA WE HAD FIRST
WE WRITE ABOUT AN ACTOR AND HIS WIFE
HOW STAGE AND SCREEN ACTING DIFFER

... REVIEWED ...

STAGE DOOR

MUSIC FOR MADAME

THIS WAY, PLEASE

WHY DON'T FILM PRODUCERS TAKE A CHANCE?

They admit there is too much dialogue in the pictures they are turning out, yet they are taking no steps to reduce the quantity. That is because they do not know how it can be done. On every lot there are some people with motion picture brains. Why not give such brains a chance to function? Producers will have to come to it sometime. Why not now? They can not keep on selling too much talk.



ADOLPH ZUKOR OBSERVES . . .

THIS from some references by Terry Ramsave in Motion Picture Herald to remarks made by Adolph Zukor prior to his recent departure for Europe: "Mr. Zukor, incidentally, admits, or perhaps more accurately, observes, that the motion picture habit is no more. He sees the industry today dependent on customers out shopping for shows." Of more value than Paramount's president's final recognition of a condition which has existed for the past half dozen years, might be his explanation for a box-office condition which has made the film business less stable and more spotty than it used to be when pictures were silent and people had the habit of going so many times a week no matter what was showing. Facts are of no value unless we know the reason for their being facts. The motion picture box-office depends largely for its revenue on exploitation and advertising. Weekly Variety recently carried several pages of Paramount's advertising. High, Wide and Handsome, one of Mr. Zukor's productions, is described in Mr. Zukor's advertising as being "the biggest picture Paramount ever produced, the picture that London, New York and Los Angeles is raving about." In another part of the same Variety, that devoted to accurate estimates of box-office receipts. we find this reference to this picture, then showing at the Astor Theatre where a film attraction which does not average \$10,000 a week is a decided flop: "A disappointing roadshow attraction; last week \$4,700." When the run of the picture at the Carthay Circle Theatre here was drawing to a close, one of Mr. Zukor's publicity men wrote, and the Los Angeles Times published, this statement: huge production has won wide acclaim and capacity houses here." In the third week of the run Variety had this to say about the business being done by High, Wide: "Playing to lowest grosses in history of this house, third week's outlook is pretty dismal; second week finished brutal \$3,900."

Film's False Pretenses . . .

WHAT part does such high, wide and handsome lying as the Paramount advertising and exploitation departments indulged in, play in breaking the attendance habit? The chief asset of any business concern is the confidence its customers place in its appraisal of its product. Here we have Paramount ly-

ing in its advertisement aimed at its first customers, the exhibitors; and lying also in its publicity aimed at its ultimate customers, those who buy tickets at the box-office. When an individual obtains money under false pretenses, he is sent to jail if proven guilty. When Mr. Zukor's company does it, it is regarded in film circles as a procedure so commendable that all the other producing organizations indulge in it. I will grant there is some element of truth in the Paramount advertisement from which I quote, for undoubtedly those who paid to see the picture raved about the poor return they got for their money, but that is not the kind of raving the fiction writer had in mind when he wrote the ad. The film industry as a whole spends many millions of dollars each year in advertising and not one word of any picture advertisement is believed by anyone. But the poor old wolf goes right ahead, quite unaware his sheep's clothing is worn too thin to conceal his identity.

There's a Bigger Reason . . .

WHILE the public's lack of confidence in any claim the producers themselves make for their product played a part in breaking the attendance habit, it was but a small part. Knowledge that the habit is broken is of no value to the industry unless it is coupled with knowledge of its cause, just as the fact of the boxoffice failure of High, Wide and Handsome is of no value to its makers unless they know why it failed. If they will go back to the SPECTATOR of July 31st and read its review of the picture-written before the picture was released to the public-they will find the reasons set forth; and if producers will go back six years in SPECTATOR files they will find the prediction that the habit would be broken and the reasons upon which the prediction was based; and if they go back five years they will find it recorded that the habit was broken, and the reasons repeated. And Mr. Zukor only today "admits, or perhaps more accurately, observes, that the motion picture habit is no more"! But neither he nor Mr. Ramsaye suggests the only matter of importance which attaches to the observation—the reason. When the tank is full of gas and your car breaks down in the middle of the road, you are not made much wiser if a mechanic looks it over and sagely announces, "It's stopped." You want it to go again, and the first step toward the attainment of that objective is the ascertaining of what made it

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No Cnds

stop. Similarly, Mr. Zukor's sage observation is of no value to anyone unless coupled with the reason for the stopping.

What the Reason Is . . .

OOKING for that reason, the first thing we find is Lethat in the days of silent pictures we cared little what was showing at our favorite film theatres; we went regularly, had the habit of going; the box-office could depend upon so much revenue from us each week. The next point to settle is the reason for our indifference to what was showing. That means delving into motion picture fundamentals. We find we were not entertained by what we saw on the screen. We entertained ourselves. We imagined the shadows on the screen were real people moving in a three dimensional world; when they conversed, our imaginations supplied the sound of their voices, and, guided by printed titles, fashioned the stories to suit ourselves. If our imaginations had not been capable of functioning in this manner, if they had not given the screen that much cooperation, motion pictures would have been so stupid, so meaningless, they never would have attracted an audience. But our imaginations did function (I have said all this before in a score of different SPECTATORS) without any help from our brains, thus making the picture house a haven of mental and physical rest, a place of escape from the real world, a dream world in which silent shadows floated past our eyes and gave our imaginations pictures to play with—a little world filled with music which only our emotions heard. The screen gave us the strongest illusion of reality ever achieved by any art, and it pleased us because we pleased ourselves with it.

Then Came the Talkies . . .

LINA

WHEN sound came to the screen, everything was changed. Hollywood went into an entirely new business. It made a fundamental change in the nature of its product. It dismissed imagination, its greatest box-office ally, and itself told the stories we hitherto had told ourselves. It eliminated the music which had created the mood of what it had shown, and strived unsuccessfully to manufacture moods in its studios. It changed its form of entertainment from emotional to intellectual; it made us listen to stories with our ears instead of permitting us to tell them with our imaginations. All this made it necessary for us to shop around for such pictures as we thought would entertain us. In the silent days we took the children, for they could imagine things to please them just as we did, but we could not take them to the talkies which left nothing to the imagination. They too had to shop. The talking device, which could have been used as a practical aid to screen art, was used to murder it. And to this day not a producer who used to make silent pictures is aware of the fact that he now is in a totally different business. It is gracious of Mr. Zukor to acknowledge we now shop for our screen entertainment, but it would mean

more to the holders of stock in his company if he would make an effort to ascertain and understand the reason why.

ONE COURAGEOUS PRODUCER . . .

10 one can accuse Hal Wallis of not having nerve. NThe daring production chief at Warners has ordered into production a picture which is going to make fake-accident crooks awfully mad at him. He will expose them and their methods. If he comes through that unscathed, he may go as far as exposing those who cheat at croquet. Little things like war, political corruption and similar social ills, are not worth bothering about. The film industry must tackle the big things first. For instance, take the habit school children have of sticking chewing gum on the undersides of their desks. Something must be done about that before the film industry can bother about a trivial thing like an anti-war picture.

CRITICIZING A CRITIC . . .

WHEN a critic records his honest opinion of the merits of the thing criticized has can not be merits of the thing criticized, he can not be charged with being wrong even if all other critics disagree with him. If a critic of a motion picture condemns it, he is right in that to him it is a poor picture deserving condemnation. Another critic, in praising the same picture, is right for the same reason; he sees it as a good picture. A Daily Variety critic characterizes as "banal and insignificant," The Man Who Cried Wolf, which in my criticism last week I praised highly; but I can not say the Variety critic is wrong. He is as much entitled to his opinion as I am to mine. But I am within my rights when I challenge the grounds upon which he bases his conclusions. In course of his criticism we find, ". dialogue painfully devoid of sparkle . . . fail to discover an inspired line or witty bit of dialogue." The Universal picture is a serious psychological drama which derives its strength from its integrity, from its honest and consistent adherence to theme and faithful maintenance of its mood. A "witty bit of dialogue" would have disturbed its mood, would have been as much out of place as a comedy monologue at a trial for murder. A critic is not justified in condemning a thoughtful, penetrating drama on the ground that it did not make him laugh. This picture was not intended as an incitement of laughter. That is the mission of a comedy, and if the Variety critic viewed it from a comedy standpoint, I agree heartily with his conclusions. I, also, saw nothing in it to laugh at, failed also to detect an "inspired line," heard only serious speeches which combined to be an impressive exposition of the theme of the story.

Origin of Wise-Cracking . . .

WHEN we are viewing a screen offering, we should be conscious only of the story. Di be conscious only of the story. Players, dialogue, settings should be blended in a manner to center our attention on the creation as a whole. Anything has a

place in it that is there by demand of the creation itself. A wise-cracking character must wise-crack to keep the pattern harmonious; but in this Universal picture none of the characters was of the wise-cracking variety, and any lines included to make laughter would have disturbed the pattern's harmony. Screen wise-cracking had its genesis in the days of silent pictures. Gilbert Seldes, in his The Movies and the Talkies summed it up this way: "Because Anita Loos wrote witty lines and C. Gardner Sullivan had a flamboyant style which appealed to Griffith, the title became an end in itself as part of the entertainment and as part of the story, until, with all their imitators working very hard, the directors of films began to depend on them to do what the camera itself should have done, and the titles gave long dialogues, or told about action, or attempted to establish a mood—all of which was the business of the camera." Seldes' book was published in 1929. Prior to that—in the SPECTATOR of May 15, 1926—I had my say about wise-cracking titles: "I feel they do not belong in pictures. They necessitate a thought process different from that involved in following the story as told by the scenes." The same criticism applies to wise-cracking dialogue in talkies.

HOW TO UNMAKE AN ACTRESS . . .

A PARAGRAPH in a recent Daily Variety has a sermon hidden in it. It tells of a little girl who found herself in Sam Briskin's office at RKO without being aware she was in the presence of the big chief of the studio. "She perched on his desk and was her natural self," says Variety, "and before she got out Briskin had tied her to a playing contract." The whole problem of the miss will be the presentation on the screen of the personality which captured Sam's fancy. But no doubt the studio will try to make an actress out of her, will teach her to express herself with tricks instead of with personality, with the result that her first option will not be taken up.

ONE IN A THOUSAND . . .

ONE young man who has my sympathy is Robert Taylor. Catapulted from obscurity to worldwide fame in less than two score months, Bob has kept his head and as far as his prominence would permit him to do so, has pursued the even tenor of his ways. By accident of birth he has developed into a young man with a regularity of features which appeals to impressionable young women and causes small men to call him "pretty." Hounded by women, the butt of brainless printed paragraphs, the victim of unwise exploitation by his employers, his every action news, he still is just a matter-of-fact, decent young fellow whose only desire is to do his work and to be left alone during his leisure hours. I believe one in a thousand is a liberal estimate of the number of young men who could keep both feet on the ground when going through the dazzling transformation

Bob has experienced, and among the 999 would be the Hollywood people whose jealousy prompts them to make him the butt of their inane wisecracks.

SHOULD HAVE EMOTIONAL APPEAL . . .

THERE are various degrees of intellectual development. All of us do not have the same brains, but we do have the same emotions. The audience for intellectual dramas, therefore, is limited, while that for emotional dramas is limitless. The motion picture with purely emotional appeal can entertain one hundred per cent of its audience, while one with purely intellectual appeal can entertain only those in the audience with intellects to grasp it. Yet picture producers vie with one another to make their productions highbrow, to make them intellectual instead of emotional, to tell their stories with dialogue instead of with pictures.

RATHER SAD COMMENTARY . . .

ONE of the chatter columnists, discussing Mae West's picture in the making, remarks, "It took the Hays office some weeks to put the stamp of approval on the script." Sad sort of commentary on the business when a producer permits the preparation of a script with so much indecency in it that it takes weeks of pawing over to make it decent.

STAGE vs. SCREEN AGAIN . . .

THE screen's vast superiority over the stage in build-I ing to a dramatic climax is illustrated vividly in Stage Door, RKO production reviewed in this SPEC-TATOR (page nine). Katharine Hepburn, a wealthy girl, is given the leading part in a play; Andrea Leeds, a skilled actress should have been given it, Katharine having had no acting experience. Our sympathy is with Andrea. At rehearsals Katharine, whose father is financing the play, is terrible; we know the play is going to be a flop. Andrea kills herself an hour before the curtain goes up; Ginger Rogers storms into Katharine's dressing room and blames her for the tragedy. The curtain goes up on the scene we had seen Katharine murder in rehearsal. Now we feel she is going to play it for Andrea, as Andrea would have played it. On the stage it must have been a great scene. On the screen it is great too, but does not get all its strength from itself as it must on the stage. The girls from the boarding house in which all of them live, occupy seats in front rows, and as Katharine begins her scene, as the pathos, the feeling, the quiet intensity she puts into it, grip the audience, the camera moves slowly from one bewildered face to another to acquaint us with the reaction of the girls in the front rows; we see bewilderment at first, then realization of the source of Katharine's inspiration, then tears. And all the time Katharine's lines are coming from the stage. We, too, have grown to love Andrea, to sympathize with her, to believe in

her, to resent a cruel fate's trick in giving to another a part she needed to keep her from starving. It is our own emotional reaction we see in the faces the camera picks out in close-ups; our own eyes grow moist when those of the girls do. I know stage people do not take kindly to my reiteration that the screen will supercede the theatre, that it is the greatest of all the arts. I am sorry they disagree, but I applaud the sincerity of their loyalty to the older art. But I can not see what the theatre can do to equal the dramatic force of the screen's purely mechanical treatment which makes this Stage Show sequence so deeply touching.

SCREEN AND SYMPHONIC MUSIC . . .

WHEN writing my review of One Hundred Men and a Girl for the last SPECTATOR, I dwelt upon the stirring effect of the symphonic music numbers played by an orchestra directed by Leopold Stokowski. I wrote that the screen could present such music to an audience with greater impressiveness than it could be presented on a concert platform, basing the contention upon the fact that the picture's orchestra numbers made a greater appeal to my emotions than any music I had heard elsewhere. Since writing the review I have learned the reason for the extraordinary quality of the symphonic interludes. The manner of recording brought the symphonies to us with a better balance of sound than an orchestra could achieve in an auditorium in which the location of a seat, in relation to each division of the orchestra, must interfere with a proper balance of the tonal quality of the various divisions as heard by the occupant of each seat. A person sitting nearer the basses than the violins would not hear the mixture as it would be heard by a person in the relative position on the opposite side of the house. This difficulty has been overcome in as far as motion pictures are concerned. Believing the matter of importance to both picture people and music lovers, I will allow Walter R. Greene, of the RCA Manufacturing Co., to explain the process fully.

Multiple Channel Recording . . .

MARKING one of the greatest advances in the history of music from the screen, "multiple channel" recording makes its appearance in 100 Men and a Girl, writes Mr. Greene. Recorded by the RCA Manufacturing Co., at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia, the classical selections which Stokowski conducts with his orchestra are the most perfect renditions of music yet heard from the screen. Multiple channel recording is a method devised by Leopold Stokowski, through which the music is reproduced in the theatre with finer quality than ever before. After months of tests and experiments, in association with RCA engineers, Stokowski worked out the system to a practical point. Multiple channel recording is vastly different from anything hitherto employed. Previously, in pre-recording selections, it has been the

practice to record the orchestra on one sound track, and the singer on another. The two were ultimately blended in the finished print. Only two tracks and channels were employed.

Used Fourteen Microphones . . .

INSTEAD of the single microphone used to make a single sound track, no less than fourteen microphones were used to make six simultaneous sound tracks for the orchestra number in One Hundred Men and a Girl. The six principal divisions of the orchestra, namely the violins, woodwinds, brasses, cello and basses, harp and percussions, were separated somewhat farther than usual on the stage; and microphones, placed close to these individual groups, were connected to six separate sets of film recorders, all driven in exact synchronism so that individual recordings of the woodwinds, brasses, violins, etc., were obtained. Later, at Universal studios, these recordings were run simultaneously on six separate reproducing machines, and all passed through a common control panel or mixer, to blend in any manner desired, and to produce a perfect balance of the whole orchestra on the finished sound track. The reason for the procedure is this: A symphony orchestra has inherent weaknesses, impossible to overcome without mechanical and electrical aid. For instance, in fortissimo passages, the fine tones of the violins are drowned out by the more strident tone of the brasses; the woodwinds are lost in the heavier passages; the violas and cellos suffer.

Preserves Balance of Tone . . .

WITH each section of the orchestra registered on its individual sound treatment of the orchestra registered on its individual sound track, it was possible, later, to mix these tracks so that the violins, for instance, would have strength to be heard in passages where the violins should predominate, or where their obligato would otherwise be smothered by the balance of the orchestra. Stokowski himself directed the orchestra-tracks for final recording, using a control box with a dial for each of the sound tracks. By altering the volume of each track, as you alter the volume of your radio, each group of instruments was finally recorded in the finished track with the perfection which Stokowski wished. "Now audiences will be able to hear the works of the masters exactly as the composer dreamed them," Stokowski said, relative to the recording in One Hundred Men and a Girl. "No one has heretofore heard these selections in the full beauty of the composer's imagination, because of the inherent weakness of the symphony orchestra. The reproductions are superior to the original renditions from which they are taken.'

ARE DIRECTORS SLIPPING? . . .

DROMINENT British director, Alfred Hitchcock, thinks the importance of directors is on the wane and that producers will be the dominant factors in the actual making of motion pictures. If that day ever comes, good pictures will be rarer than they are today. Hitchcock might as well argue that a man who selects a canvas, buys the color and brushes and picks out a landscape, contributes more to the painting than the artist who paints it.

WE HEAR IT THE FIRST TIME . . .

WHEN radio broadcasting begins to develope mentally to catch up with its technical advances, I hope the first manifestation of its newly acquired intelligence will be the elimination of tautological signings-on, such as: "This is the Chase & Sanborn hour, presenting Don Ameche as master of ceremonies," followed instantly by: "This is the Chase & Sanborn hours: Don Ameche speaking." You can multiply it by almost the total number of sponsors represented on the air.

PERSONS AND PERSONALITIES . . .

FRANK JENKS is a character actor whose performances I always enjoy; an important and suitable role would gain him great popularity. . . . Some producer should make it his business to develope the boxoffice possibilities of Madge Evans, a charming girl who has everything that makes for success on the screen. . . . Tom Jackson, seen frequently as a hardboiled detective, could win a prize at a country fair for the marmalade he makes. . . . Jonathan Hale is a bird-lover; in the spring prowls around on the alert for nests of baby birds whose mothers have been killed; takes little ones home, feeds them by hand, sets them loose when they are big enough to go it alone. . . . I would enjoy seeing the stalwart, dignified, handsome David Torrance in a good part. . . . No one else can deliver a comedy line with quite as much expression as Jean Arthur puts into it. . . . I would like to see another production directed by Joe von Sternberg. . . . And a really important story directed by young Frank McDonald. . . . Of all the noted stage actors in pictures I know no one who possesses greater elements that make for screen popularity than Joe Schildkraut. . . . The great success of The Prisoner of Zenda is a tribute to the lasting power of Ronnie Colman's popularity. . . . There is one thing I want to do when I listen to one of Jimmy Fiddler's open letters—and I do mean booh; but we must say this for Jimmie—he's making good money and, if careful, probably will not have to end his days in an old ladies' home. . . . If Leo Carrillo really runs for governor of the state, he can count on all the votes in my family. . . . Just heard of another of Marion Davies' charitable acts; would annoy her greatly if I told of it, for not more than one in twenty of her benefactions is known by even her close friends; there is a great Irish heart inside Marion. . . . Will Jack Benny please move over and give Mary Livingstone a place beside him in the acting hall of fame? In her first picture, This Way, Please, Mary comes through with flying colors. . . . Dropped in on the De Mille set at Paramount to say hello to C. B.; New Orleans

waterfront set smelled so fishy I beat it to stage 13 and watched Frank Lloyd shooting Abraham Lincoln for his Wells Fargo; good director, Frank. . . . Also visited Kurt Neumann when he was directing Mary Carlisle and John Howard in a love scene; Kurt told me the SPECTATOR has taught him a great deal; reads it thoroughly. . . . George Lewis, former screen juvenile, is rehearsing for the play in which Sylvia Sidney will star in New York. . . . Harriet Hilliard has a charming, appealing screen presence; I like her singing.

MEETS WITH OUR APPROVAL . . .

CCRAPPING a whole lot of writing which had the D. stage as a background for The Goldwyn Follies story, Sam has changed the locale and will present his picture against the background of a Hollywood film studio. Thus once more our most astute producer demonstrates his astuteness. But the idea was in the Warner Brothers studio before Sam thought of it. On January 12th last, when Sam was having his story written against a stage background, I wrote a letter to Hal Wallis, Warner production chief. To show how thoroughly I agree with Sam on the wisdom of his switch, I quote from my letter to Hal, a letter, by the way, which produced no results: "At present all the song-dance-spectacle pictures are imitations of one another and all have the same theme: a struggle to produce a stage show. The film industry doesn't seem capable of thinking about anything else. If the stage had a hold on the imagination of the public to justify the theme, there would be legitimate theatres in all the cities in the country. To the public at large the stage is about the deadest theme there is, yet all of you constantly present it. And all the time it is getting harder to think up anything new about it. What is the world's most glamorous form of entertainment? The screen. Very wellmake a picture showing how the adventuresome young hero is struggling to make a picture. The story is right under the noses of all you producers has been for years—and none of you has seen it. In the screen you have a background the whole world is aching to see more intimately, a background which would make reasonable the great spectacles you now make unreasonable by trying to make us believe they are staged in theatres. The screen is alive. The stage is dead. Get on a live one!"

OLIVIA ON SCREEN ACTING . . .

STAGE acting consists of a player's absorption in his role and his conscious projection of it to an audience separated from him by the footlights. Screen acting consists of as complete absorption, but does not concern itself with the projection of his emotions to the audience. On the stage a player has to act his part; on the screen, he has to feel it. That is why players without stage training must, in the long run, become the best screen actors. Of course,

that fact does not prevent Hollywood from haunting stage doors in the hope of adding one to its already too dense talent population, but when the boys and girls now studying the screen in schools and colleges, take over the making of motion pictures, they will put no premium on stage experience as part of one's career as a screen actor. An illuminating exposition of the SPECTATOR'S theory of screen acting was made recently by Olivia de Haviland, the clever girl who is making a big impression in Warner pictures. This is what she had to say in an interview published in the Los Angeles Examiner: "For The Great Garrick I read stories about Peg Woffington, who was David Garrick's leading lady, and had other famous heart interests of the period, until I had the feel of the Eighteenth Century—its rules of etiquette, modes of dressing and manners of speech. Psychologists, of course, explain that what really happens is that the actress steeps herself in the ancient lore until her subconsciousness becomes so charged with it that her recreation of the character becomes an unconscious process. And, underneath, I believe that, too, but I know that my little game of pretending to myself that I'm the reincarnation of Peg Woffington lends an added realism to my acting."

LESLIE AND ANN, HIS WIFE . . .

TWO young picture people who interest me greatly are Leslie Fenton and Ann Dvorak, his wife, even though I never have seen the latter off the screen. On the screen she always interests me, but the odds and ends of things I have read and heard about the two, interest me in her still more. I never have read of their presence at a night club or wild party, but I have heard a lot of the things they are doing on their ranch somewhere in San Fernando Valley, of their adventures in chemical research, of their horticultural experiments, and early the other morning when I was cultivating gingerly among the tender stems in our bed of blooming flox, the milkman who serves us both, paused on his round long enough to tell me about Ann and a little bird which fell out of its nest and was found by her. It was a pathetic, hairless thing when Ann and Leslie went into conference over it. Now it is bald-headed, but its robust body is covered well with healthy feathers. It spends its days in the Fenton trees, coming when called to sit on the finger of Ann or Leslie, and always at night summoning someone to let it into the house to sleep in its own little house which its foster parents built for it. It likes hamburger. Leslie Fenton has one of the most brilliant minds in pictures, is one of the finest actors ever to appear on the screen, a young man who has roamed the world, who has lived as the people lived in the places at which he lingered; he is a student of psychology, philosophy, the sciences. But I think it is all of five years since I have seen him in a picture. Hollywood is like that. But I am an optimist; I believe everything eventually will right itself. I do not think such a mind as Leslie's can lie fallow long, for all his shyness and reserve. And you know I like to make predictions. Here is another: Somehow or other Leslie Fenton is going to be discovered. Not as an actor, but as a director he will gain fame, will be among the meager handful who will be entitled to be called great. Another entry in my prediction file to be taken out sometime and put under an "I Told You So" headline in a SPECTATOR.

MAKES A PREVIEW RECORD . . .

WARNER'S HOLLYWOOD THEATRE has established a preview record not even approached by any other house during the nearly dozen years of the SPECTATOR'S existence. In seven nights recently it had six previews, all important pictures, four of them being from the Warner studio and two from Sam Goldwyn. And for all but the last night the feature picture was Ever Since Eve, which made it important that one should not arrive at the theatre too early.

ABOUT STARS' APPEARANCES . . .

ITOW many pictures should a recognized star make n in one year? Recently, between shots on the set where she was working, Claudette Colbert and I sought the answer to that question. One a year we agreed was out—not enough to keep a star interested in his or her work or to enable him or her to make as much money as reasonably could be made. Four? Too many; would keep the star's name perpetually on some marquee in every big city. So it resolved itself into choice between two and three. I stood out for two, which Claudette thought might be too few to keep the public from forgetting the star; my contention being that established stars could not be forgotten so easily and that to make more, a star would be working more for the government than for himself. I recalled that Bill Powell had told me about his working for the government for the first seven weeks of a ten weeks' engagement—some such figure. The country needs revenue from the income tax, but I do not see why the main burden of taking care of government expenses should fall on the shoulders of a group of motion picture stars. Another thing: a star's new picture should come as an event of importance. Too many such events makes each unimportant. And as for public forgetfulness—there are people the public can not forget and for whom absence truly makes hearts grow fonder, and up near the top of the list is Claudette Colbert.

HE KEEPS HIS HAT ON . . .

BY way of the *Era*, the hundred-year-old amusement paper published in London, I learn that fifteen hundred newspapermen "have protested to Hollywood against the caricatures of pressmen constantly seen in films." As far as I knew I was the only one.

Era goes on to print some publicity sent out by Paramount and quoting Al Hall, director of Exclusive, to the effect that in that picture he was "determined to prove that the usual reporter may safely be brought into respectable homes without ripping up draperies, cursing at his hostess, overturning the piano, and corrupting the morals of the children." Era's only comment is, "But will he take his hat off?" For Editor Atkinson's edification I will answer his question: He does not. He has it on even when about to seat himself at the table in the dining room of his fiancee's home, and she takes it off his head. Motion pictures by this time must have taught the public that all newspapermen behave that way, and no wonder fifteen hundred of them entered protests.

RADIO AND THE SCREEN . . .

MONG the many things I can not understand is A why anyone should wish to see a motion picture after listening to a radio broadcast of its essential features. The weekly Hollywood Hotel presentation of film stories makes them old stuff by the time they reach the screen. It might be strictly in accord with altruistic business ethics to let the people judge in advance of the entertainment qualities of a motion picture and make up their minds if they wish to see it. but it appears to me to be bad box-office business. Equally bad business is the constant presentation on the screen of motion picture players. You do not have to take my word for it. I can quote one in a position to speak with authority. William Brandt, who heads the independent theatre owners in New York, knows the show business. He is one of the men upon whose showmanship the film industry depends for its revenue. Listen to what he had to say recently in an interview published in Variety: "Sunday nights used to be great in film theatres. It was the payoff session, when exhibitors, rain or shine, could count on some profit. Sunday receipts always were three-tenths of the whole week or better. Are they now? You ask me. Sundays are lousy, and just because the picture stars are appearing on the big Sunday night broadcasts, giving their stuff away right in the front parlor. Why should the public pay to see them in the theatres? The answer is that the public has stopped paying to see them. Radio is murdering the picture business. I've told them so out here. I've made speeches about it, but does anyone care? Not a darn. They say it's good advertising for the film stars. They say it's the way to make new personalities. For radio, yes; but not for pictures. No. It all doesn't make sense.'

HE GIVES GOOD ADVICE . . .

RECENTLY I overheard a producer giving good advice to a young screen actor. "Avoid professional coaches if you can." was the advice. "Don't learn stage acting technique if you expect to get anywhere on the screen. See every picture in which Spencer Tracy appears and study him. His perform-

ances in the last five years constitute the most valuable course in screen acting available to any player, young or old." And so say I.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

UR postman has 757 stops on his rural route; he goes hither and thither for 28 miles; each day has to leave his car about 60 times to ring door-bells and collect postage; rest of time sits in his car and pokes mail into the tin boxes we rural dwellers have perching on posts at the roadside. . . . Ronnie Colman feeds guests a spaghetti dish, the recipe for which he insisted upon getting when he ate it at our house. . . . Photographs of my wife, children and grandchildren decorate the walls of my library; they are what I want, and interior decorators who have ruled photographs passé can go take a jump in Toluca Lake. . . . Elisha Cook, Jr., is a little chap whom I have been noticing doing bits in pictures. Apparently producers have not been noticing him. If they were, he would be doing big things. . . . On an apricot tree outside my bedroom window there are scores of alarm clocks which awaken me pleasantly each morning—little birds of the sparrow family who chatter incessantly and all at once, perhaps planning the day's activities. ... I would enjoy Anita Louise's screen appearances more if she would drop her linguist affectations and talk like the American girl she is. . . . At the moment, the efforts of Freddie, the spaniel, to have a relaxing nap on a garden setee are being frustrated somewhat by Petruska, the kitten, who, prostrate on Freddie's body, is biting his ears. . . . Somehow or other I have to work my way down to the bottom of this column before I can give the lawns their much needed mowing; sorry now that I undertook the season's mowing job to keep myself fit; novelty has worn off. . . . A dish of Mrs. Spectator's peach shortcake for dinner last night. . . . Let's see; how much farther is it to the bottom of this column? . . . In the melon season I go for them in an exceedingly large way. . . . My favorite preview theatre is the Alexander, Glendale; Mrs. Spectator and I always occupy the same seats, last row, farthest from center of house; same seats at Westwood Village where Andre Michaels, a sweet girl usher, holds them for us. ... Tremendous excitement among picture reviewers at the Alexander recently when rumor spread that Ed Schallert had arrived at a preview on time; proved untrue, of course. . . . Lack of modulation in Graham McNamee's voice in Universal Newsreels is beginning to get me. . . . Awakened at two o'clock this morning by the wails of a puppy some heartless motorist dropped over a fence across the road from us and then sped on; puppy spent rest of the night in Mrs. Spectator's bedroom and is now trying to eat my shoelaces while Petruska, the kitten, Freddie, the spaniel, and Bo Peep, the Peke, rally 'round cordially, souls of hospitality. . . . Our milkman burns seven gallons of gas on his route each day. . . . A blue jay in the locust tree-why, here's the end of the column!

SOME LATE PREVIEWS . . .

EACH issue of the SPECTATOR carries reviews of pictures previewed during the previous calendar week. This issue contains reviews of the pictures seen up to and including Saturday of last week. Angel, the Lubitsch Paramount picture, and Love Is on the Air, a Warner picture, previewed on Monday of this week, will be reviewed in the next SPECTATOR, as will also those shown up to this Saturday night. The SPECTATOR is printed early in the week to enable it to reach distant subscribers as closely as possible to the date it carries.

ANOTHER PAN BERMAN HIT . . .

● STAGE DOOR, RKO. Producer, Pandro S. Berman; director, Gregory La Cava; screen play, Morrie Ryskind and Anthony Veiller; from the play by Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman; photographer, Robert de Grasse; musical director, Roy Webb; art directors, Van Nest Polglase and Carroll Clark; set dressing, Darrell Silvera; gowns, Muriel King; recorded by John L. Cass; film editor, William Hamilton; assistant director, James Anderson. Cast: Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Adolphe Menjou, Gail Patrick, Constance Collier, Andrea Leeds, Samuel S. Hinds, Lucille Ball, Franklin Pangborn, William Corson, Pierre Watkin, Grady Sutton, Frank Reicher, Phyllis Kennedy, Eve Arden, Ann Miller, Margaret Early, Jean Rouverol, Elizabeth Dunne, Norma Drury, Jane Rhodes, Peggy O'Donnell, Harriett Brandon, Katherine Alexander, Ralph Forbes, Mary Forbes, Huntley Gordon.

ONCE again the screen demonstrates its superiority over the stage as a medium for the presentation of a stage play. Under the direction of Gregory La Cava, Stage Door, the Edna Ferber-George Kaufman theatre success, becomes a screen offering of greater strength because of its greater intimacy. Freed from the physical restrictions the stage puts upon it, its audience drawn into it by the magic of the motion picture camera, it makes its players just people who convey no suggestion of the fact of their being actors playing parts. The picture sustains, with greater integrity than the stage could achieve, the straight line of the narrative. Unhampered by consideration of either time or space, under no necessity to assemble its characters at arbitrarily fixed spots whose number is fixed by the mechanical limitations of the theatre as to both time and space, the screen crowds more story into an hour and a half than the stage could accomplish in three hours. This allows for more concentration of audience interest in the thread of the story, far more close adherence to the sequence of events and the creation of our more continuous sympathy for the people involved in the drama. But a still greater advantage the screen has is its power to draw us into more intimate contact with the people, to permit us to look into their eyes, to hear their sighs, to accompany them wherever they go.

Its Direction Outstanding . . .

THE strongest feature of La Cava's direction is his creation and maintenance of the atmosphere of the theatrical boarding house in which most of the action takes place. It is filled at all times with chattering girls, each ever hopeful of a call from a play producer. Under La Cava's guidance, the performances of the girls who have only a few lines to speak are as meritorious as those of the boarders who play the leading parts. Even though all of them are actresses, or hope to be, not in one scene is there a suggestion of acting. They are human, likeable girls, their conversations light-hearted and gay, but through their gaiety there is ever present a note of sincerity, of acceptance of things as they are and hope for things as they should be. There are no leading women in the boarding house, no stars; all of them are just boarders, each seemingly interested in only herself, but all united by a bond of common interests. Katharine Hepburn is one of them, no more important than any other, and continues to be one of them even after she becomes a Broadway star. Ginger Rogers, too, is just one of them, as is Gail Patrick and a score more, all of equal rank as boarders, those I mention being more prominent solely by virtue of having the most lines to speak. Thus it is a beautifully balanced production, its story cleverly adapted by Morrie Ryskind and Anthony Veiller from the exceedingly clever play, and sparkling with the witty dialogue which helped to make the play so successful. To Pandro Berman and to all others who contributed to its physical attractiveness, only the warmest praise is due.

Some Notable Performances . . .

OTHER performances she has given have gained prominence for Katharine Hepburn as a screen actress but have not made her an outstanding box-office star. Stage Door will increase her standing as an actress and make her hereafter a stronger box-office magnet. Always before she seemed to me to be challenging attention to her acting. Here we have her as just an ambitious girl, a warm-hearted one, an impetuous, positive character who earns and retains our interest and sympathy by the very lack of obvious bidding for them and her apparent unawareness of our existence. She delivers no lines to us, indulges in no histrionics—as I have said, she merely is one of the girls, something she still is at the moment of her brilliant triumph as an actress, a cinematic moment you long will remember; and many times there will live again in memory the poignancy of your emotional reaction to it. Nothing in the picture gave me greater pleasure than Ginger Roger's complete dissipation of my doubts as to her right to consideration as an actress of importance. Previously I had not been able to see her as an actress. Apparently all she needed were a good part and Gregory La Cava. She has both in Stage Door and scores a triumph. Her role calls for a wide assortment of emotional manifestations, but she proves equal to all it demands. Another of the picture's strong assets is the performance of Andrea Leeds, a comely young woman who earned more spontaneous outbursts of applause by the preview audience than any other individual member of the cast. Her scenes were in themselves sure-fire, but it required rare skill and deep feeling to develope all their potentialities. You may

put this young miss down as one whose name in marquee lights will direct your footsteps to the box-office.

Adolphe Scores Once More ...

OTHER feminine players in the cast so largely feminine, are Gail Patrick and Constance Collier who fully maintain the standard which gained them prominence. Ann Miller, an attractive girl whose dancing in The Life of the Party was one of its few entertaining features, does little dancing in Stage Door, but adds greatly to it by the manner in which she handles one of the important secondary roles. She dances beautifully, has a charming personality and complete naturalness—another screen aspirant to keep an eye on. Phyllis Kennedy plays a character role with discrimination, maintaining a nice balance between its comedy and human elements. Elizabeth Dunne might have stepped from a theatrical boarding house, so convincingly does she manage the one in Stage Door. I would like to mention individually several of the other boarders, but all their names are strange to me and I don't know who played what. But in the crowd of femininity there was no losing Adolphe Menjou. What a brilliant actor that fellow is! He can say more with a look, a shrug of shoulders, a wave of his hand, than most players can in a speech. There is no hero in Stage Door, no romance, and Adolphe is the nearest approach to a villain it has. The real villain is life, fate, the refusal of the wheel of fortune to stop at the right number; but Adolphe, who plays a theatrical producer, controls a spoke or two in the wheel, so to him the blame for its heartless stoppings. A big contribution to the picture is the comedy characterization of Franklin Pangborn, one of our really brilliant comedians.

MARTINI'S SINGING WILL PLEASE . . .

● MUSIC FOR MADAME, RKO. Producer, Jesse L. Lasky; director, John Blystone; screen play, Gertrude Purcell and Robert Harari; original, Robert Harari; music and lyrics, Rudolph Friml, Gus Kahn, Herbert Magidson, Allie Wrubel, Nathaniel Shilkret and Edward Cherkose; musical direction, Nathaniel Shilkret; photography, Joseph H. August; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; film editor, Desmond Marquette. Cast: Nino Martini, Joan Fontaine, Alan Mowbray, Billy Gilbert, Alan Hale, Grant Mitchell, Erik Rhodes, Lee Patrick, Frank Conroy, Bradley Page, Ada Leonard, Alan Bruce, Romo Vincent, Barbara Pepper, Edward H. Robins, George Shelley, Jack Carson.

THE fine voice of Nino Martini should prove enough in itself to make Music for Madame a success. Jesse Lasky has given the picture a handsome mounting, and the music composed for it by Rudolf Friml, Nathaniel Shilkret and others give it artistic merit. The story, not as closely knit as its material made possible, has a sound and new premise: an unknown young man with a fine voice, comes to Hollywood to bid for fame; he falls into the hands of a gang of crooks, and a logical sequence of events makes it necessary for him not to sing in public lest his voice be recognized and he be arrested for a crime he did not commit. Unfortunately, however, so much effort was expended in crowding "sure-fire box-office" into

the production that the artistic quality of the vocal and instrumental music, and the comedy interpolations with which the picture is endowed so plentifully, scarcely will appeal to the same audiences. Martini's previous picture, The Gay Desperado, preserved its mood throughout; each of its elements fitted naturally into its place in the narrative with the result that the picture as a whole kept the interest of the audience continuous throughout. Preservation of the mood, as I so often have written, is the first essential of a motion picture, and Nino Martini's singing and Billy Gilbert's brand of comedy can not successfully share the same mood.

Disturbance of Mood . . .

At the conclusion of Martini's encore number in an impressive sequence staged in Hollywood Bowl, and while the spell of the singer's voice still lingers with us, we are snapped rudely out of our agreeable mood by the appearance of Gilbert who repeats an antic of which we previously had grown tired in this picture because we had seen it so many other times in every picture in which he had appeared. Too many producers proceed on the theory that as we laughed when we first saw Gilbert's sneeze break up a scene, it follows that we will laugh every time he repeats it even if the scene is one in which it does not belong. Currently showing is One Hundred Men and a Girl, a picture which is a perfect blending of elements to create and preserve a mood. Its comedy touches be-

May the Luck

of the Irish

Be the Luck

of the Weekly

PAT O'BRIEN

long in it, do not interrupt its forward progress, are parts of the picture's mood pattern. In the Universal production the great conductor's secretary is a serious young man engaged only in carrying on as we would expect from the secretary of such a man. He makes no effort to attract our attention to himself at the expense of our attention on the story. In Music for Madame the secretary of a great conductor is played by Gilbert, cast in the picture for the sole purpose of attracting attention to himself and to create laughs which have the effect only of interrupting the continuity of our interest in the story. Not for a moment will the dullest person in an audience believe such a man as the conductor would tolerate as his secretary such a clown as Gilbert. I feel sorry for Gilbert. An extremely capable comedian, he is being made a positive pest by the distorting of stories to find places for his sneezes.

IS HARDLY WORTH WHILE . . .

● THIS WAY, PLEASE, Paramount. Producer, Mel Shauer; director, Robert Florey; original, Maxwell Shane and Bill Thomas; screen play, Grant Garret, Seena Owen and Howard I. Green: film editor, Anne Bauchens; art directors, Hans Dreier and Jack Otterson; photography, Harry Fischbeck; dances, LeRoy Prinz; musical direction, Boris Morros; music and lyrics, Sam Coslow, Frederick Hollander, Al Siegel and Jock and George Gray; costumes, Edith Head; assistant director, Joseph Youngerman. Cast: Charles "Buddy" Rogers, Mary Livingstone, Betty Grable, Ned Sparks, Jim and Marian Jordan, Porter Hall, Lee Bowman, Cecil Cunningham, Wally Vernon, Romo Vincent, Jerry Bergen, Rufe Davis.

BECAUSE it brings back Buddy Rogers, this picture will rate some attention, but when its circuit of the film theatres is completed it will have done neither Buddy nor Paramount any good. Buddy is the same good looking, charming fellow he always has been, and if he escapes being cast in pictures as bad as this one, he should regain all his former box-office strength. The This Way, Please story is impossible. Buddy falls in love with Betty Grable the instant he sees her. That is all right; it could happen. She is a nice, well behaved girl who should appeal to any right-minded young fellow. Buddy has a row with Porter Hall, manager of the film theatre in which he (Buddy) sings and in which Betty is an usher. To get even with Porter, Buddy asks Betty to marry him; the wedding, widely exploited, is to take place on the stage of the theatre. On the appointed evening the house is packed, the bride and her attendants are gorgeously attired, but there is no bridegroom. Buddy is elsewhere, giving reporters the story of his jilting of the expectant bride at the altar, and Betty's first knowledge of it is gleaned from screaming headlines in a newspaper extra handed her by Lee Bowman while she still is waiting for the man she loves. Lee is equal to the occasion; he offers himself as a substitute bridegroom, Betty agrees, they march onto the stage, the bride on the arm of the groom, which never is done in a well staged wedding; Buddy, after a terrific fight with a gang of reporters for no apparent reason, and which leaves him without even a rumpled lock of hair even though he had been

hurled viciously at a lot of machinery in a sound booth, comes yelling down the aisle, hops on the stage, Betty smiles at him—and so they are wed.

It Is Altogether Too Much . . .

TOO great a strain is put upon our credulity when I we are asked to accept as the hero of a story a young man who would humiliate publicly a girl he loves, to satisfy a grudge he has against a theatre manager. But Paramount asks us to accept it, stages it imposingly, provides it with some catchy music, pretty girls and quite a collection of comedians, all of which Director Robert Florey struggles with manfully without making it believable. Those who like Fibber McGee and Molly on the air will be entertained by their presence on the screen. Another radio favorite is presented in the person of Mary Livingstone, who photographs well and gives a thoroughly competent performance. Rufe Davis, previous servitude unknown to me, has to his credit the most interesting interpolated number-a song embroidered with some startling vocal sound effects. Ned Sparks delivers his lines with a refreshing departure from the monotonous monotone which has been a feature of his characterizations, but the effect of his performance is lessened by the continuous presence between his lips of an unlighted, half smoked cigar. I never have been able to grasp the comedy values of a chewed cigar which I know must smell to high heaven. Lee Bowman is a young man of promise,

Good Luck

to

Weekly Spectator

GEORGE RAFT

has an ingratiating presence, a well modulated voice, and should earn considerable popularity. Unfortunately, however, This Way, Please will do little good to anyone in it. Perhaps on paper the story looked plausible. In that way only can I account for the fact that it reached the screen.

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

ESSENCE OF SATIRE . . .

REVIEWING a recent picture which took a satiri-cal viewpoint toward Hollywood, I remarked that the increasing tendency for the film capital to become introspective in its pictures was interesting. Certainly it would seem that the town is becoming more critical of its processes, acquiring that "awareness" which some psychologists designate as a characteristic of a well developed personality. Most of these pictures, however, have been satirical in tone, and as satire several of them have lost some of the effectiveness they could have had, through a certain disgust or bitterness that has crept into the script. Such is the case with the current Something to Sing About, in which the protagonist, James Cagney, acquires such a snarling contempt for Hollywood that he runs away on a cruise to the South Seas upon the completion of his first picture, without even informing the studio of his whereabouts. It will be recalled that in Once in a Lifetime, the granddaddy of them all, the attitude of the author was essentially one of resignation, not disgust.

Author Must Be Superior . . .

In this play also the author conveyed his impressions of Hollywood principally through the reaction of a protagonist, the leading lady. She was the "norm," against which the filmland inanities were contrasted; she represented us, in a way. But always she kept a sense of humor. Her dominant attitude toward the Hollywood goings-on was one of tolerant resignation, never disgust. It was this viewpoint on the part of the author that led us to laugh with him at the filmland chaos. The most essential factor in good satire is that the author keep the upper hand; he must rise above those at whom he would poke fun. When he lets himself become ruffled, he has lost ground to his adversaries. One must keep himself superior if he would make another look ridiculous.

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THE TRIUMPH OF WILL . . .

MEN in the film tales, the heroes at least, show the most remarkable control over their baser natures. Not a sign of a "pass" does Ray Milland make when he docilely lies down in his bath robe to go to sleep almost cheek to cheek with the lovely and champagne-mellowed Jean Arthur in Easy Living. And an even nobler example for boy scouts was set by Fred MacMurray in Hands Across the Table, in which he spends much of his time parading about Carole Lombard's apartment in various stages of deshabille, and not once does a suggestive word pass his lips. Come to think of it, seems he did mutter one veiled and hesitant proposal, a boyish blush passing over his face, but this can be overlooked. After all, men are men, even the heroes of film tales.

A COLORED POST CARD . . .

FROM London comes an interesting post card, interesting not only because of the greetings thereon expressed by my good friend Tommy and his wife Sylvia, who form the talented dance team of Harris and Shore, but also because of the colored drawing on its face, the treatment of which illustrates aptly the direction I think color work on the screen must take if it is to realize its best possibilities. The Old Curiosity Shop of Dickens' fame is pictured, but instead of all the colors of the rainbow being used in the portrayal, as is done on most post cards, this one uses principally but two, a greyish blue and brown, in

It is a Pleasure
to get the Spectator
Twice as often

ROY DEL RUTH

different shades and tones, assisted by a very small touch of pale green on a tree way at one side. Moreover, no attempt is made to present details meticulously, an especial characteristic of our American cards, but everything is drawn in a very general way, the design of the picture being of most importance.

I cannot make out the form of a single book among those jumbled objects catching the light in the window, yet I feel the place is full of stacks of books; their red and green jackets are more vivid in my mind than if I had looked upon a presentment of them. Looking into the window are a man and a woman, but not a touch of flesh color is on them; they are only a part of the sombre bluish shadow made by the eaves. Yet I know they are interesting persons, probably a young composer and his poetess sweetheart, looking for rare prints with which to decorate their garret when the priest has united them. See how it brings out the latent romanticism from beneath my veneer of brittle cynicism?

Mood Most Important . . .

THIS is a good drawing because it stimulates the imagination. In it the artist has used color and lines first of all to establish the atmosphere or mood of the place, according to the established artistic principles by which these elements are commonly utilized to create atmosphere, and regardless of what variously colored objects actually may have been in the scene. Only as of secondary interest has the artist regarded graphic details, and merely the essentials of the scene are presented. These essentials are calculated to have a suggestive effect upon the mind of the spectator, so that greater detail will take form there. No graphic portrayal of the shop could half so well acquaint one with it. This is what the best color photography of the future will aim to do, when cinematographers have ceased trying to rival nature, and devote themselves to painting, using the colors that can best be reproduced and most harmoniously combined.

NEED OF PLANNING ...

If the Comedians and Leading Men plan to make their baseball game a yearly event, let us hope they decide before next summer whether they are really going to play a ball game or put on a clown show. Either might be entertaining if well done, but both cannot be done at once. The thespian ballplayers

BERNARD W. BURTON

... Film Editor ...
"100 Men and a Girl"
Universal

might also decide whether they are on the field to have publicity pictures taken by a horde of cameramen or to entertain the thousands of persons in the grand stand, 25,000 at the recent fracas, I hear tell. The game this summer, which fizzled out in confusion before it was finished, was put on with such a lack of planning or purpose, that it is doubtful if any large percentage of those attending will jostle their way into the stadium if a game is given next year. Everyone recognizes that a charity event is a commendable thing, but the people whose patronage makes such a venture profitable come primarily to buy entertainment, which it is up to the sponsors to deliver.

KEEN EXPRESSION . . .

AND exceedingly apt is the description given by Philip K. Scheuer, writing in the Los Angeles Times, of a make-shift yarn in a musical film; he dubs it "an off-and-on story."

REVERIE: Hollywood men can grow hair the fastest... I have always wanted to draw a cartoon of a pudgy and cigar-biting movie mogul exiting from a preview, and, with a shrug of his shoulders, saying, "It vasn't even colossal." . . . But I can't remember for sure whether the idea is my own. . . . Charles Carroll, of Hollywood Hotel and other programs, is among the best of radio actors. . . . A

Long Life

to

The Weekly

WESLEY RUGGLES

KURT NEUMANN

DIRECTED

"Make A Wish"

FOR PRINCIPAL PICTURES



JUST FINISHED

"Hold 'em Navy"

FOR PARAMOUNT

prize for concocting nomenclature should go to the apartment house manager whose establishment is called The El Trojan. . . Didn't Evelyn Brent look smart in that grey-furrish outfit on the Paramount lot t'other day? . . . I have never gotten one of those ritzy pencils with a flashlight on the end such as some of my colleague critics have been seen to brandish. . . . All my scribbling is done in the dark, but only twice have I been unable to decipher what I had written. . . . Wonder if Mary Brian still practices tap dancing in that little pavilion down by the lake back of her house. . . . Of all the times I have been up to the SPECTATOR office I have only taken the elevator once. . . . Just a bounding Tarzan.

SOUND OPINIONS

SOUND OPINIONS

By Don Susano

THE August number of the Readers' Digest informs us that an army of solicitous attendants traveled with the late Joseph Pulitzer, ready to shield him from unnecessary noises. He was so extremely nervous that he would wince with pain at the mere sound of someone cracking an almond shell. Thus almonds were barred from his table. Once he ordered two hundred of the best Havana cigars sent to the captain of a White Star liner because his boat dipped her flag when passing the Pulitzer yacht instead of blowing the "damned whistle" as most captains would.

Mr. Pulitzer could afford to be extremely nervous since he was an extremely rich man. But how about the extremely nervous persons among the extremely poor, forced to live in noisy tenement houses or near boiler factories where rents are cheap?

F the countless nerve specialists and rest homes scattered throughout the nation are indicative of our shattered nerves, then a large percentage of picturegoers must have nerves so badly wracked that they are ready to go on strike.

Have movie producers ever considered the condition of their patrons' nerves? Apparently not, if we are to judge by the hammer and cold-chiseled, scratchy, screeches which shriek at you from the screen every time an automobile comes to a dead stop. Those screeching car brakes give most of us the jitters. My wife squeezes my hand purple every time she thinks a



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car is about to slow down. It is only then, after nearly ten years of wedded bliss, that we go back to holding hands at the movies.

Of course, there are some with the epidermis of a rhinoceros, who, while the rest of us squirm in our seats even at the screeching of the baby breaks of an Austin, remain as impervious as a chunk of granite. My companion one night was like a chunk of granite, a strapping six-footer with plenty of poundage about his frame to cushion his most sensitive nerve fiber. He even had the nerve to poo poo at screeching car breaks, and grin at me with impudent bravado while I was praying that the film would break or catch fire.

BUT as the film unwound, suddenly his excessive poundage proved as vulnerable as lukewarm jello. He saw, or rather heard, the thin penetrating rasp of someone filing upon a piece of glass. I could not see in the dark how sickly green he turned. But when I lead him home he was as limp as a sack of potatoes gone soggy.

Shortly before the screen found its voice, enterprising movie empresarios were beginning to exploit their houses also as rest retreats. Here the weary and the tender nerves could go into an hour-and-a-half hideout, in an atmosphere of peace and quiet, soothed by the doleful music of the pipe organ.

In our block lived an attractive eldest sister mothering one of those impossible families of nagging, scrapping and ungrateful younger brothers and sis-

ters. Naturally this frail, dutiful person often felt like throwing the mother role overboard and the blasting radio out of the window. But instead of obeying the impulse or controlling herself by swallowing a handful of aspirin tablets, she would take two dimes and a nickle from the sugar bowl and hurry to the nearest movie emporium for an entertaining nerve treatment.

AND then the sound deluge! Motion picture houses, which were just blossoming with the added boon to humanity on the therapeutics angle, suddenly went into reverse. No longer do movie emporiums take the place of rest homes, but on the contrary, prepare their patrons for one.

Producers may say: "What do you want us to do—shut off the damned noise for the sake of your blinkity blank nerves?"

Of course not! The noise can still continue. But it can be handled so that it will no longer impinge upon the nerves. In fact, it is possible to hear the sudden tightening of brakes without the accompanying nerve-wracking screeches. Perhaps it sounds too much like eating your cake and having it too. But it can be accomplished by means of imaginative sounds, soothing sounds which create the illusion that we are listening to the actual sounds of every-day life but which do not bring us the irritating qualities which make real sounds so devastating to our nerves.

LEW

SIDNEY D.

POLLACK and MITCHELL MUSIC and LYRICS

"THIN ICE"

"MY SECRET LOVE AFFAIR"

"OVER NIGHT"

"MY SWISS HILLY BILLY"

In Production
SONGS FOR
"LIFE BEGINS IN COLLEGE"
"IN OLD CHICAGO"
"HEIDI" (Shirley Temple)
"HE WAS HER MAN"
(Gracie Fields' English Production)

Under Contract to
Twentieth Century-Fox

The Great Garrick

JAMES WHALE Production

FOR

MERVYN LE ROY

Hollywood 10 cents SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Twelfth Year

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OUTDOORS ALWAYS BOX-OFFICE
TALKIE HISTORY IN THE MAKING
NEWSMEN ENTER A PROTEST
CALLING TURN ON TAY GARNETT
DOROTHY ARZNER'S GOOD WORK
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HANDICAPS OF B DIRECTORS

... REVIEWS ...

BRIDE WORE RED ★ THE GREAT GARRICK ★ DOUBLE WEDDING ★ THE PERFECT SPECIMEN

MADAME X ★ DANGER—LOVE AT WORK ★ EBB TIDE ★ LIFE BEGINS IN COLLEGE

FIGHT FOR YOUR LADY ★ FIT FOR A KING

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



ABOUT WESTERN PICTURES . . .

NE hot day seven or eight years ago, a friend who now is an important producer, sat with me in the shade of a tree and gave me some advice. In the Spectator which had appeared a few days before, I had urged the big producers not to abandon Westerns, as all of them then were doing or threatening to do; I pointed out that the big outdoor pictures were the surest-fire box-office product available to picture makers. The advice my friend gave me was to get on the right side of the Western question. He, he told me, had figures to prove Westerns were as dead as last year's roses, that the public was fed up on them, that they were elemental stuff, suitable to the primitive days of screen entertainment, but now lagging far behind the public's growing taste for more matured screen fare. He liked both me and the Spectator, he said, and did not like to see us getting off on the wrong foot, "playing a dead one," I think is how he termed it. He urged me to come to his office where he would show me figures which demonstrated the public's rapidly growing disinclination to patronize what he called the "horse operas."

We Accept An Invitation . . .

NE hot day a couple of weeks ago I sat with my producer friend in the luxury of his private office and basked in the light of his greater importance. It was the first time I had visited him in his office since he had invited me to come and scan his Western figures. We scarcely had our pipes going nicely before he asked me if I knew where he could find a young fellow who could be developed into a Western star. It was his intention, he informed me, to show all other producers just how horse operas should be made. First, he wanted a good looking young fellow who could both ride and sing; then he was going far afield for his locales to bring new scenery to the screen, was going to spend as much money on a Western as was spent on the average A picture—in short, was going to make only class A Westerns. But did I know any available young man? I told him I had come to his office to see the figures which demonstrated definitely that Westerns were dead. That did not bother him a bit. He countered with the claim that what he said years ago was true then, and trotted out the old standby—public taste has changed since then.

Matter of First Importance . . .

NE of the serious ailments from which screen entertainment suffers is its producers' purely objective approach to the selection of story material. They think it is the story which entertains their audience. They have no analytical sense and would not understand what you meant if you told them it is the medium, not the story, which is the matter of first importance. They translate their story material in terms of physical action instead of in terms of human impulses. They wear threadbare one story idea and hide their folly behind their claim that the public changes its mind so often no one could be expected to keep up with it. As I have written at various times in the past, the one fixed, unchangeable, undeviating factor affecting pictures is the audience. The public never changes. It has superficial shifts of fancy; in the fall it will go for football pictures; with war on its mind, it may be attracted by the series of Shanghai films now being shot; but each of these topical pictures to be successful must appeal, as must all other pictures, to the one thing in man which never changes, his fundamental human emotions. When Westerns were the outstanding money-making pictures, they appealed to something in us which still is in us. We have not changed, but the Westerns

Why Westerns Are Winners . . .

0NE factor in the decline of Westerns was their producers' ignorance of the reason for their former success. As I have said, the producers' approach to them was objective. If a picture showing its star riding a white horse, became a box-office success, throughout Hollywood would spread the word that there had been another shift in the fickle fancy of the public and that hereafter it would accept only Westerns in which heroes rode white horses. It was inevitable that pictures made with so deep an ignorance of the fundamental appeal of the theme, finally would be spurned by the public. The big producers got tired of making them and the little fellows made them from one pattern. And through it all, Westerns survived as one of the film industry's known assets. But they are gaining renewed studio recognition slowly. If those who set the studio programs understood the medium in which they work, Western pictures regularly would play the biggest film

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houses in the world. Some day there will arise a producer with brains enough to grasp why Westerns can be the biggest box-office bets. But as I made the same assertion in a Spectator eleven years ago, I can place no time limit on my present prediction. Westerns are good box-office because they are elemental, primitive; because we can project ourselves into them. When we see a gangster on the screen pursued by a G-man, we have no inclination to cast ourselves in either role; but when we see a gay cowboy astride a good pony, dashing down a trail in the great, clean, sweet-smelling and boundless West-Oh, boy, that's something we'd like to do! To the factory worker in New Jersey the sight of our Western mountains and plains comes like a vision of a promised land. The combined esthetic and physical appeal of Westerns gives our emotions a wide range of reaction.

WHEN TAY MADE HIS BOW . . .

NINE years ago this month I reviewed the first picture directed by a young fellow whom previously I had known only as a screen writer. "Tay Garnett is an intelligent young man," I wrote. "I have seen his first picture, Celebrity, and there is enough merit in it to indicate he is going to be a credit to his new profession. . . . He has the necessary ability, and no doubt will acquire courage to strike out for himself and follow where his intelligence leads." All I knew of Tay then was what I saw reflected in his first picture. Today all the studios are competing for his services, but already he has "struck out for himself" by taking a trip around the world, "following where his intelligence led," to secure backgrounds for two pictures which he will make on his own as soon as he can resist the tempting bait dangled before his eyes by producers to tempt him to make pictures for them before branching out for himself as a producer-director. The interesting thing about my prediction is that it was six years after I made it that Tay first got it into his head to strike out for himself and prove me a good prophet. As Spectator readers know, I have a well developed prediction complex, but in all the years of its indulgence I can recall none other I made that was quite such a long shot as the one concerning Tay's future.

PLAYERS AND THE CRITICS . . .

AFTER a preview, five of us who have been writing about motion pictures for years, found ourselves together in an ice cream place. During the shop-talk someone mentioned that he had received a very nice letter from one of the supporting players in a picture he had reviewed, the note conveying thanks for the reviewer's kind remarks about the player's performance. We compared notes and discovered that all of us remember those from whom such evidences of appreciation come, and watch their work thereafter with greater interest. The interesting thing about our discussion, though, was the discovery that none of us receives more than two or three such letters in the course of a year, although most of us re-

view more than two hundred pictures annually. Publicity departments in studios and press agents of players are a rather dull lot. We expect players to take it for granted that critics should be humbly grateful for the privilege of saying kind things about their performances, but one would think that people paid for exploiting picture talent would have enough brains to see that the players ingratiated themselves with reviewers by being thoughtful enough to express their appreciation of particularly favorable comments on their work. Most of my few letters come from young players who not yet have grown so great they feel it is I who should thank them.

GENTLEMEN OF THE PRESS . . .

ERRY RAMSAYE, editor of the Motion Picture Herald, pokes a mild finger into the fuss being kicked up by newspapermen over the manner in which members of their profession have been characterized in various motion pictures. As far as I know, the SPECTATOR was the first to enter a protest against showing editors and reporters on the screen as (quoting Douglas Churchill in New York Times), "crooked, unethetical, heartless, boorish, drunken and corrupt fellows, ill-mannered and illtempered, with an exaggerated idea of their importance and their calling." The Spectator's wail was a lone one at first, but by now it has become a mighty chorus of newspapers all over the country. Ramsaye advises the film industry to make an effort to square itself by exploiting what he terms, "the glamours, poignancies and dramas of the life of the great commonality of normal folks," and he goes on to say, "So this is in nomination of the country editor, friend of the people and a pretty big, important fellow in several thousand little towns. . . . Among the heroes of America are the country editors who not as a class have come to fame." As the son of a country editor, I wish to second the nomination. And to advance the matter one more step, I cast Lionel Barrymore in the part of the country editor. He played such a role in Ah, Wilderness!, but the picture was not about him.

TALKIE HISTORY IN THE MAKING ...

AN incident in talkie history: Nine years ago, in a Pullman drawing-room en route from New York to Washington, three men were engaged in earnest conversation. They were Adolph Zukor, Jesse Lasky and Walter Wanger, Paramount executives on the way to the company's annual convention at the national capital. The talking picture was new then and Paramount, the biggest, most important producing organization, was taking it less seriously than any of its competitors. The three executives were going over the statements regarding the coming season's output of completely silent pictures. The new element of sound was not mentioned. While the discussion was proceeding, Randolph Rogers, then and now Jesse Lasky's secretary and right-hand man, was

standing in the doorway of the car, reading an article in a film paper. When he had finished reading it there was a full in the conversation. Rogers handed the paper to Wanger, indicating the article; Wanger read it, handed it to Lasky, who read it, then passed it to Zukor, who, after reading it, remarked, "Perhaps we are not taking this sound business seriously enough." Next day at the convention President Zukor informed the convention that Paramount would have a complete sound-and-talking program of pictures to offer exhibitors during the ensuing season. The film paper which Rogers read and handed to Wanger was the Spectator of August 18, 1928, which contained a long article on the inevitability of sound pictures. A sentence: "Many people have muddied the water by hurling verbal missives at the innovation, but nothing can blind the clear-thinker to the inevitable conclusion that all-sound pictures will be the universal screen entertainment of the future."

FAVORITES A DECADE AGO . . .

TEN years ago Norman Webb, now publishing Box Office Digest, was rating pictures and personnel for the Spectator. In September, 1927, the box-office line-up of the first ten in the various divisions was as follows:

STARS Charles Chaplin Douglas Fairbanks Joan Crawford Harold Lloyd Rudolph Valentino John Barrymore Lon Chaney John Gilbert Ronald Colman Wallace Beery Richard Dix

STARS Norma Talmadge Greta Garbo Lilian Gish Clara Bow Colleen Moore Mary Pickford Marion Davies Bebe Daniels Vilma Banky Norma Shearer

FEATURED Antonio Moreno Iack Mulhall Lois Moran René Adoree Belle Bennett Sally O'Neil Dorothy MacKail Charlie Ray Louise Dresser

DIRECTORS King Vidor Fred Niblo Clarence Brown Cecil B. de Mille George Fitzmaurice Ben Schulberg Edward Sutherland Lloyd Sheldon Henry King Eric von Stroheim Clarence Badger Tod Browning

WRITERS Fred de Gresac Bess Meredyth Laurence Stallings Frances Marion John McDermott Lenore Coffee Dorothy Farnum Elliott Clawson Hans Craly Ben Glazer

SUPERVISORS Irving Thalberg John W. Considine, Jr. Sam Goldwyn W. R. Sheehan Ralph Block Jack Warner Julian Johnson Eric Pommer

EXCESS FOOTAGE EXPENSIVE . . .

WHEN Souls At Sea was previewed it was too long for general release. I caught most of it again while attending another preview at the Paramount Theatre. A long courtroom sequence, which was given more footage in the previewed picture than was justified by its value to the story, was reduced to only a few feet of film showing Gary Cooper being cleared of the crime for which he had been tried. Unfortunately, however, in cutting out so much of the trial sequence there was eliminated also the footage which explained the charge upon which he was being tried. Those who saw the picture at the Paramount must still be wondering why Gary was placed on trial. If the critics who were invited to the pre-

view had been shown the picture in its abbreviated form, their praise probably would not have been as generous as they gave the version they saw. Producers never will get me to believe a screen story cannot be cut to release length in the script. Hollywood spends each year an aggregate of millions of dollars in exposing film which does not reach the screen. I do not see why the plans for a picture can not be as explicit as those for a house. Some months ago a producer asked me to read a script. I entertained myself by estimating the footage there would be in the picture if everything in the script were shot. It came to 18,000 feet. Some of the sequences were eliminated from the script, but not as many as I suggested. In the first rough cut of the film there were 14,000 feet. It finally was reduced to about 8,000 in the released print. No one can pursuade me that that is efficient picture making.

PERSONS AND PERSONALITIES . . .

AURICE CHEVALIER would be a big American box-office player yet if he had been handled intelligently while here. . . . I am still waiting for some producer to give Julie Hayden the big part that will allow her to show what a fine actress she is; when there are girls like Julie available, it is idiotic for studio scouts to scour the country for new faces. ... My hat is off to Jack Barrymore; younger than he has looked for years, alert, vigorous, going about the business of making a living at his trade, content to do a good job and let someone else get the top billing. . . . C. B. deMille is thorough in all things; watched him the other day directing three of his people for a still photograph with all the meticulous care he exercises when directing a shot for his picture. ... I still am waiting for some producer to reveal box-office intelligence by giving Jack Mulhall a big part; it means something when an audience applauds a bit player as soon as it sees his face, and that is what always is happening to Jack. . . . Others I would like to see: Sara Haden in a part which would allow her to show what a really fine actress she is; Claude Allister in one of those character roles he does so well; Clarence Muse as a sympathetic negro in a picture which would give him a logical reason for singing at least one number. . . . Harold Palmer, a special effects man at Universal, is destined to do big things in the technical end of the screen. . . . Phil Scheuer and Connie, his bride, back from their honeymoon; two such fine young people that each of them is to be congratulated; Phil's picture comment appearing in Los Angeles Times always graceful writing and good sense. . . . One of Ernst Lubitsch's favorite cinematic tricks is indulged in in Angel; long corridors along which characters take long walks and long stairways up which they take long climbs; I never have been able to grasp the significance of such shots, but they must mean something to Ernst. . . . Encountered Walter McGrail on the Boulevard; a man who served pictures long and efficiently; a pleasing personality the screen to its advantage could use more frequently.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

IT HAS GREAT DIRECTION . . .

 THE BRIDE WORE RED, MGM; producer, Joseph L. Mankiewicz; director, Dorothy Arzner; play, Ferenc Molnar; screen play, Tess Slesinger and Bradbury Foote; musical score, Franz Waxman; dances staged by Val Raset; recording director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Daniel B. Cathcart, Edwin B. Willis; gowns, Adrian; photographer, George Folsey, A.S.C.; film editor, Adrienne Fazan; assistant director, Edward Woehler. Cast: Joan Crawford, Franchot Tone, Robert Young, Billie Burke, Reginald Owen, Lynne Carver, George Zucco, Mary Phillips, Paul Porcasi, Dickie Moore, Frank Puglia.

WHEN Hollywood lists its most talented picture directors in order of main directors in order of merit, the name of Dorothy Arzner hereafter must be up near the top. Her direction of The Bride Wore Red is brilliant. Although still quite a young woman, Dorothy made haste slowly in rising to the point of importance as a director. A graduate of the cutting room, all her pictures have had that easy, forward flow that distinguishes the work of directors who have had cutting experience. I believe I have seen all her pictures. The general impression they gave me was that she was concerned more with perfecting the mechanics of her trade than with developing all the human qualities of her stories. The Bride is her graduation essay. Her technique now is so perfected it does not reveal itself; we are conscious only of expression in human terms and can detect no "Arzner touches," which draw attention to themselves at the expense of our interest in the story. Only the most expert and selfeffacing director could have spun such a simple, intimate social drama into so long a film and sustained our unwavering interest in it. The present season has given us many outstanding creations, but none which outshines The Bride Wore Red as a superb exhibition of screen craftsmanship. Tess Slesinger and Bradbury Foote provided a screen play of distinct merit. How many of the brilliant lines had their origin in Molnar's play, I do not know, but that part of the script that was wholly the work of the scenarists, the construction of the motion picture, is notable screen writing.

Interesting from the Start . . .

WITH no waste of time the story gets under way. In the first sequence the theme is set: Are we creatures of birth or environment? Representing birth, we are given Robert Young of the nobility. Representing environment, we have Joan Crawford whom we first see as an entertainer in the lowest dive in Trieste, a half-starved girl of no boastful lineage and distinguished from the other girls only for her ability to speak grammatically and intelligently. A tipsy joker gives her money, clothes and a two-weeks' sojourn at a fashionable hotel in the Alps at which Young and others of the upper social set are guests. There the problem in sociology is worked out. It is a box-office theme by virtue of its fairy-story aspect. "What would I do if I were-?" is a question we ask ourselves many times. Certainly every girl without money has asked herself what she

would do if suddenly she found herself with an abundant supply of it as well as unlimited credit at fashionable gown shops. On the screen Joan Crawford is each of these girls. She answers the question for all of them. And the picture concerns itself only with answering the question. It fits the brothel girl neatly into the social life of the fashionable resort and does not try to make us laugh at silly comedy the situation would have suggested to less discerning producers.

Triumph for Joan Crawford . . .

WITH many outstanding characterizations already to her credit, Joan Crawford's performance in this picture will be recalled when all her previous ones have become indistinct memories. For the first time she is completely the screen actress, which is another way of saying that for the first time she does not suggest the actress. She is just a girl upon whom fate plays an odd trick, and all her reactions to it impress us as being consistent with her characterization. In the low dive she looks as if she belongs there; in the smart resort she is as much at home as the other guests. Her performance is deep, sincere, an engrossing study of a girl's reaction to a strange experience, an intelligent performance which only a girl who can think could make so convincing. Another admirable performance is that of Franchot Tone. It is an easy, natural, lovable characterization, surpassing anything Tone previously has done on the screen. Gone is that supercilious something which formerly weakened his picture appearances by its suggestion of an underlying superiority complex. Tone is not a great actor, but in this picture he is a great person, one with the soul of a poet, who expresses beautiful sentiments in beautiful language, who is sympathetic, understanding, patient, and who loves greatly.

All Performances Outstanding . . .

WITH such direction inspiring them, the members of the cast could not fill of the cast could not fail to maintain the high standard of acting set by the star and her leading man. Miss Arzner made it easy for them to deliver convincing performances by seeing that they read their lines in the easy, conversational tones which makes people out of actors. Robert Young, Billie Burke, and Reginald Owen never were better. I was interested in noting that Miss Burke had to be made up considerably to make her appear at least somewhere nearly as old as she must be by this time. The Bride shows us Lynne Carver, whom I noticed the night before as the wife of John Beal in Madame X. In her second picture she has a bigger part and is a decided asset. It is easy to predict for her a successful screen career. However, only careful handling will develope her possibilities. She has a sympathetic personality, one which suggests sweetness, tenderness, breeding, and, in the background, intelligence, but I suppose it is inevitable that we will see her as a gangster's moll at some stage in her career. Mary Phillips, whom I can not recall having seen in any other picture, gives a vivid, clean-cut characterization as an hotel maid. We are given a few glimpses of that engaging boy, Dickie Moore, whom some producer should develope sense enough to keep before the public.

Production Is Imposing . . .

JOE MANKIEWICZ has provided the picture with an imposing production which includes many majestic shots of mountains and beautifully composed and photographed landscapes. The Metro art department provided settings of equal visual attractiveness, and Adrian designed some gowns which the camera of George Folsey uses as composition in photographic etchings which adorn the screen. In detailing the technical excellence of The Bride, I must give credit to Adrienne Fazan for competent film editing. A feature which will interest Joan Crawford fans is that young woman's debut as a singer. Gus Kahn wrote for her a song which has the virtue of having a thought in it, but the mood of the scene in which Joan sings it does not permit her to do the song justice as a piece of lyrical writing or do herself justice as a singer. Franz Waxman set the Kahn words to music and I think the combination makes Who Wants Love? a song the public will like.

MERVYN HAS SOMETHING NEW . . .

● THE GREAT GARRICK, Warners production and release: personally supervised by Mervyn LeRoy; stars Brian Aherne and Olivia de Havilland; a James Whale production; directed by James Whale; screen play by Ernst Vajda; photographed by Ernest Haller; music and arrangements by Adolph Deutsch; art direction by Anton Grot; film editor, Warren Low; costumes by Milo Anderson: makeup by Perc Westmore; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; assistant to LeRoy, William Cannon; assistant director, Sherry Shourds. Supporting cast: Edward Everett Horton, Melville Cooper, Lionel Atwill, Henry O'Neill, Luis Alberni, Lana Turner, Marie Wilson, Linda Perry, Fritz Leiber, Etienne Girardot, Dorothy Tree, Craig Reynolds, Paul Everton, Trevor Bardette, Milton Owen, Albert Van Dekker, Chester Clute.

MERVYN LeROY has given the screen not only its first period-costume comedy, but also its first picture in which obvious acting has a legitimate place. The opening title terms The Great Garrick "A play for the screen, by Ernst Vajda." It is a simple play, of few complications, but as produced and cast by Mervyn and directed by James Whale, it comes as another fine film attraction in this season of many fine ones. The story is soon told: to avenge what they think is a slur cast upon their acting ability by Garrick, a company of Comedie Française players takes over an inn on the road from Calais to Paris, the purpose being for the players to amuse themselves at the expense of the English actor when he stops there for the night. Thus we have a group of actors and actresses acting the parts of inn employees. That constitutes fundamentally sound comedy. The Spectator's contention always has been that the screen is not an acting art, that its appeal is to our emotions only, and that no part of its mission is to challenge our intellectual appraisal of the characterizations as exhibitions of acting. In the theatre we are entertained by acting; in the film house we

are entertained by the stories and accept the players as the people they play.

Its Premise Is Sound . . .

WHEN we view The Great Garrick, we bring our theatre minds, as well as our film minds, to bear upon it. We accept the members of the inn staff as Comedie players and are entertained by the manner in which they act their parts as inn people. Thus, for the only time I can recall, we have over-acting and spouting of lines as legitimate elements of a screen attraction. If the players conducted their inn duties with the self-effacing efficiency of real inn people, the comedy values would be lost. It is their unfamiliarity with inn duties which makes their efforts so amusing. So, to get from the abstract to the concrete. The Great Garrick is excellent entertainment because it has a sound premise and because all its inherent values are developed brilliantly by the author, producer, director and cast. As good as it is, and as worthy as most of the former LeRoy productions have been, we get the impression from it that Mervyn is just beginning a career which will be distinguished by a series of productions of physical magnitude, visual attractiveness and artistic merit. Certainly one could not wish for a more lavish investiture than that of Garrick. Laid in a period in which men vied with women in the gorgeousness of their attire, when the lowest flunkey was more picturesque in appearance than a captain of industry is today, it offered the costume designer a rare opportunity to display his skill. The designer who saw the opportunity and made so much of it is Milo Anderson, who, I am informed, is but twenty-five years old. The future is bright for one so young whose work does not suggest his youth.

Is a Triumph for Olivia ...

WHEN Brian Aherne makes his first appearance, he becomes the center of the becomes the center of the stage, and all the way through he dominates every scene in which he appears. He gives a truly brilliant performance as a great actor who is not acting. In the entire picture we see but two people among those in important roles, who are not of the theatre, the lovely Olivia de Havilland, who plays a girl of the French nobility, and Edward Everett Horton, who plays secretaryvalet to Aherne. Her performance in this picture establishes definitely for Olivia a permanent place among the screen's leading actresses. Two years ago we had not heard of her; today, with all the assurance of an actress with a succession of brilliant years behind her, with physical beauty and personal charm in degrees rare among women, she shares scenes with such a skilled veteran as Aherne without asking us to take into consideration the difference in the ages of the two or the short term of her experience as compared with that of his. I am not going to give all the individual mention the excellence of the performances would justify. Nineteen names are listed in the cast, and it is quite beyond me to think up nineteen synonyms for "excellent." Not in the entire picture is there a performance which disturbs the harmony of the acting pattern which Director Whale so competently has created.

Whale's Direction Outstanding . . .

WHALE directs with authority, with full understanding of the script values, and with a lively sense of humor which makes the production such a joyous piece of screen entertainment. Its mood is a far cry from that of his Road Back, and his mastery of it is a tribute to his versatility. All the praise for the smooth forward flow of the story, however, can not go to the direction. The film editor must be considered. Garrick is a splendid example of skilful film editing, and to Warren Low must go high marks for that. Anton Grot's art direction also deserves mention. The production is one of the most brilliant accomplishments in his brilliant career as an art director. Ernest Haller's photography brings to our eyes a succession of pictorial masterpieces and some rare examples of striking portraiture. Almost startling in its effectiveness is the bringing to life of some fine old tapestries as scenes fade in. I believe Garrick is the first picture to give credit to the make-up man. I see by the credits that Perc Westmore is "cosmetician." Making so many women look so beautiful is an achievement worthy of mention. Music plays a big part in the success of the picture. Adolph Deutsch, composer and arranger, and Leo Forbstein, musical director, are to be commended for their contributions to a picture which you really must see.

CONTINUES TO GROW THINNER . . .

● DOUBLE WEDDING, MGM; producer, Joseph L. Mankiewicz; director, Richard Thorpe; play, Ferenc Molnar; screen play, Jo Swerling; photographer, William Daniels; music, Edward Ward; film editor, Frank Sullivan; assistant director, Red Golden. Cast: William Powell, Myrna Loy, Florence Rice, John Beal, Jessie Ralph, Edgar Kennedy, Sidney Toler, Mary Gordon, Barnett Parker, Katharine Alexander, Priscilla Lawson, Bert Roach.

FIRST Bill Powell and Myrna Loy appeared together in The Thin Man. It was deservedly a hit, a sparkling, clever comedy which made a lot of money for Metro. Then came After the Thin Man, made carelessly and hastily to cash in on the pleasant memory of the thin man's first appearance. The Spectator did not like it, and said so, but said also that it would be a box-office success by virtue of its stars and its title. It was a success, even though it was much thinner than its predecessor. Now we have the Powell-Loy team in another picture made as another cashing-in venture in which thinness is carried to the point of emaciation. Double Wedding never rises much above the point of silliness and has nothing to offer the public except the popularity of its two talented stars. A combination of comedy, farce and extravagant slapstick, Double Wedding defies classification, its story consisting of a mixture of possibili-ties, probabilities, and impossibilities with which Richard Thorpe struggles manfully though hopelessly to achieve something that will appeal evenly to the sense of humor of those who view it.

It Is Asking Too Much . . .

EXTRAVAGANT flights of fancy have a legitimate place on the screen. A trip to the moon can be made entertaining. We know it is impossible, but if it be presented plausibly and with a consistently sustained invitation to the audience to enter into the spirit of the scenarist's flight of fancy, the imaginations of those who see it will function in sympathy with it to the point of complete acceptance of it for what it pretends to be. In Double Wedding we freely accept Bill Powell as an irrepressible, irresponsible and amusing artist as long as his actions are consistent with the characterization established from the outset, but we lose interest in him when he becomes a clown and does things which take him out of character and makes it impossible for us to believe that he would earn the love of a girl characterized as Myrna Loy is. And when you view the picture, you never for a moment will believe that Bill would love a girl like Myrna. In other words, you will not accept as possible the trip to the moon even when you see the man in the moon entertaining the trippers. Myrna's talent and personality are not equal to carrying the burden of the characterization given her. It is ridiculous to cast her as a big executive, to make a girl like her a controller of the lives of other adults to the point of dictating when they could or could not have a bath. It is going much too far to ask us to believe two such opposite characters would fall in love with one another. They might, of course, but not in the manner in which the picture developes the romance between them.

Mystery of Jessie Ralph . . .

ANOTHER thing in Double Wedding we can not believe is that a person as sane as Myrna Loy could live in the same house with a person as insane as John Beal. The clever young actor is characterized as so extravagantly dumb that we can not see him as associating with the other characters, and we will not believe a nice, intelligent girl like Florence Rice would fall in love with him; nor will we believe that Florence would submit to such complete domination as Myrna exercises over her. The element of mystery enters into the production by virtue of the presence of Jessie Ralph in several scenes. The only explanation I can advance for her appearance is that she must have wandered onto the wrong Metro set, and Dick Thorpein any event being somewhat bewildered by the script -not knowing she did not belong in his cast, shot her along with the rest of them. If there is a more logical explanation, I would like to hear it, for certainly I could not see what Miss Ralph had to do with what was going on. Double Wedding perhaps is one of those pictures which manage somehow to get away from their producers at the outset and never get back on the right road. If Jo Swerling's screen play was as illogical as the screen's interpretation of it, its faults would have been too glaring to have escaped detection before shooting began. Dick Thorpe has my sympathy. This was, I understand, his first major picture, a promotion earned by his excellent direction of many class B offerings. Although given an impossible job to make an entertaining picture of the Double Wedding material, he probably will be held responsible for the general dissatisfaction with which the picture will be received. Hollywood is like that.

QUITE A NICE COMEDY...

● THE PERFECT SPECIMEN, First National; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Harry Joe Brown; director, Michael Curtiz; screen play, Norman Reilly Raine, Lawrence Riley, Brewster Morse and Fritz Falkenstein; original story, Samuel Hopkins Adams; assistant director, Frank Heath: photographer, Charles Rosher; film editor, Terry Morse; art director, Robert Haas; dialogue director, Gene Lewis; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Errol Flynn, Joan Blondell, Hugh Herbert, Edward Everett Horton, Dick Foran, Beverly Roberts, May Robson, Allen Jenkins, Dennis Moore, Hugh O'Connell, James Burke, Granville Bates, Harry Davenport, Tim Henning.

 M^Y old golfing companion, Samuel Hopkins Adams, fashioned this story on the main situation in his sparkling and highly successful It Happened One Night, that of boy and girl taking the road and having experiences which make excellent motion picture material. There ends the similarity between the screen treatments of the two. The Perfect Specimen gives us Errol Flynn and Joan Blondell as the boy and girl, a competent supporting cast, a lively screen play written by a crowd of scenarists, an ample production watched over by Harry Joe Brown, excellent photography by Charlie Rosher, and a fine bit of film editing by Terry Morse. Of course, even with all that, a picture could be a dud if the director fell down on the job. But Mike Curtiz never falls down. He is one of the dependables, has a good sense of both comedy and drama and gives us only honest, forthright pictures of box-office value. The Perfect Specimen is box-office in any house. It is a joyous affair; it moves swiftly, offers a wide variety of action, both physical and sentimental, and runs its course to the accompaniment of continuous audience tittering. The story is one of the untying of Errol Flynn from his grandmother's apron strings-of the transformation of a meek submitter into an energetic doer. A story of that sort is easy on its scenarists in that it allows them to inject action, in essence extraneous, but legitimate story material by virtue of its bearing on the development of the central character's emancipation.

Our Compliments to Joan . . .

WE are given a roadside brawl, a prize fight, wild auto chases, a kidnap alarm, two pleasant romances and much rich comedy, all for the one price of admission. That should be enough for any reasonable audience. Joan Blondell and Errol Flynn make an excellent team. The Warner studio apparently does not realize what it has in Joan. I am not aware of the specific reason for her present fuss with her bosses, but if it be a protest against her appearance in inconsequential roles, she will be doing the studio a favor if she remains on strike until it sees the value of giving her only headline parts. Young,

beautiful, intelligent, there is no other comedienne in pictures more entitled to stardom or who could sustain it more successfully. No picture in which she appears could be a complete flop, and none in which she has a part which allows her freedom in expressing it can fail to be a box-office success. She adapts herself so readily to the requirements of her story material, that we get the impression that in each new actor who plays opposite her she at last has found her ideal team mate. At the moment I feel she and Flynn form the perfect team, but I suppose I would change my mind if I saw her paired with Paul Muni or the Mauch twins.

Errol Flynn and the Others . . .

LLYNN is well cast in The Perfect Specimen, his f athletic appearance and prowess being an important feature of his performance. He is tender and understanding in the romantic interludes and reveals an intelligent grasp of comedy values. The secondary romance is played by the attractive and talented Beverly Roberts and the always agreeable Dick Foran. Their performances are in every way satisfactory. Hugh Herbert and Edward Everett Horton provide comedy. It is Hugh's 149th repetition of his standard performance and Eddie's 262nd of his. Both these capable players must be getting sick of the parts they are called upon to play. Allen Jenkins, always an excellent player, but one who ruined most of his performances by excessive shouting of lines, is not so vocally vociferous in this picture, and, with Dennie Moore, a capable character actress, adds a great deal to its entertainment value. May Robson plays the dominating grandmother. Her voice dominates all her scenes. The direction of her dialogue is the only flaw in the production. I do not blame her as she is one performer who can deliver any kind of characterization demanded of her. Here we have her voice raised to an unnecessary volume and rasping quality that make it disagreeable to listen to. Her performance would have been far kinder to the ears of the audience if she had been characterized as a soft-spoken, determined woman who insisted upon having her way. I suppose, however, that as long as producer intelligence remains in its infancy, Warners and all the others will continue to sell rasping noises to that part of the public willing to buy it.

IT LEAVES OUR EYES DRY . . .

MADAME X, MGM; producer, James Kevin McGuiness; director, Sam Wood: play, Alexandre Bisson; screen play, John Meehan; photographer, John Seitz; montage effects, John Hoffman: music score, David Snell; art directors, Cedric Gibbons, Urie McCleary and Edwin B, Willis; film editor, Frank E. Hull; assistant director, Tom Andre; a Sam Wood production. Cast: Gladys George, John Beal, Warren William, Reginald Owen, William Henry, Henry Daniell, Phillip Reed, Lynne Carver, Emma Dunn, Ruth Hussey, Luis Alberni, George Zucco, Cora Witherspoon, Jonathan Hale, Aida Kutznetzoff.

T HIS story has been told so many times that if it had started off as Madame A, it by now automatically would become Madame X. Produced with Metro's usual thoroughness, an excellent job of direc-

tion by Sam Wood, a well written screen play by John Meehan, deft film editing by Frank Hull, and a cast in every way competent, this latest version of the Alexandre Bisson play still is not destined to receive generous box-office support. Metro is going to find it can not sell stage performances to motion picture audiences. It offers Gladys George as star of the piece, and she gives it a really great performance which in a theatre would have moved us profoundly, but which on the screen does not reach our emotions. If I have any qualifications whatever for judging a motion picture, the chief one is one I am in no way responsible for—the ease with which a lump comes to my throat and tears to my eyes when the screen makes even the slightest bid for them. I used to try to be he-mannish in my consideration of pictures, try to temper my emotional response and coldly balance their merits and demerits. But it was no go. I surrendered to my emotional complex. If a picture which should make me cry, does make me cry, it is a good picture even if it is a bad one; and if it does not make me cry, it is a bad picture even if it is a good

We Cannot Believe It . . .

WHEN viewing Madame X I should have cried, for it is perhaps the most distressing story ever brought to the screen. But it never once got under my skin. I did not believe it. I did not believe a husband would treat the mother of his child as ruthlessly as Warren William treats Gladys George. I had no sympathy for a wife who so meekly would submit to such treatment by her husband. But, you will argue, Madame X has made the whole world cry, which is proof the world must have accepted what I refused to believe. No incident in the play ever caused a tear to drop. Audience tears were caused solely by the manner in which the incidents were presented; it was the art of the players, not the pathos of the story, which moved audiences. Across the footlights of a theatre Miss George's performance would have gone to the hearts of her audience; from the screen it comes to us as a beautiful bit of acting. which our intellects absorb and to which our emotions remain indifferent. Ten years ago the cover of a Spectator bore in big letters, "The stage has nothing to offer the screen," and inside was an article which recorded opinions I never have had occasion to revise.

And Still Shirley Temple Leads . . .

WE have had famous stage actresses in motion pictures for years, yet Shirley Temple is the world's leading box-office actress. Famous stage actors have come to Hollywood in droves, yet none of them has gained the box-office strength of Clark Gable, with insignificant stage experience, or Robert Taylor, with none at all. That surely is evidence to support my claim that stage performances cannot be sold to motion picture audiences. From the stage Miss George would have projected her characterizations to us; her appeal would have been through our intellects to our emotions. On the screen she has only to feel her scenes, to grieve, not to project grief; we are

at her side, looking into her eyes, sharing her sorrow in the degree in which she feels it. The reason players proficient in stage technique do not become boxoffice head-liners in motion pictures is that they are trained to project emotions instead of to feel them. Miss George gives us a powerful portrait of an actress simulating the grief we would expect a tragic mother to feel; a grown-up Shirley Temple would have been a pitiful figure feeling the grief. We admire Miss George; we would have cried with Shirley.

People, Performances, Photography . . .

THERE are some screen performances in Madame I X. Reginald Owen gives one of them. We accept him as the person he plays, not as an actor. Another true-to-life portrait, even though a brief one, is provided by Jonathan Hale, one of the easiest, most natural and convincing players on the screen. And we believe Emma Dunn, that exceedingly clever woman with a sympathetic and charming personality whom we do not see as frequently as we should. George Zucco, whose good work I have noticed in other pictures, makes his brief appearances as a doctor stand out prominently. Henry Daniell makes a suave and chilling villain. John Beal plays the leading part with all the earnestness the role demands. In the big trial scene he and Miss George deliver their speeches with dramatic intensity that drew the applause of the audience. John Hoffman is responsible for some remarkable photographic effects which the credits erroneously list as "montage," but which under any designation form a graphic device for advancing a screen story. The production designed by Cedric Gibbons and two of his competent associates, Urie McCleary and Edwin B. Willis, contains some beautiful and atmospheric French interiors which John Seitz's photography makes one of the picture's attractions.

THIS ONE HIGHLY AMUSING . . .

● DANGER—LOVE AT WORK, 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, Harold Wilson; director, Otto L. Preminger; story, James Edward Grant; screen play, James Edward Grant and Ben Markson; photographer, Virgil Miller; assistant director, Gordon Cooper. Cast: Ann Sothern, Jack Haley, Mary Boland, Edward Everett Horton, John Carradine, Walter Catlett, Benny Bartlett, Maurice Cass, Alan Dinehart, Etienne Girardot, E. E. Clive, Margaret McWade, Margaret Seddon, Elisha Cook, Jr., Hilda Vaughn, Charles Coleman, George Chandler, Spencer Charters, Hal K. Dawson, Etanley Fields, Paul Hurst, Claud Allister, Jonathan Hale, Charles Lane, Paul Stanton.

ELIGHTFUL nonsense, excellent entertainment. D Coming as the last of a preview-every-night week it is just what is needed to give the mind a dusting out and refreshening for the next series of mental problems the screen will present. The story of Danger-Love at Work is one which so easily could have been spoiled on its way to the screen. A nonsensical mixture of improbable situations involving members of an exceedingly screwy family, it has to be either hilarious entertainment or a somber flop. That is what makes such story material a ticklish proposition for a director to tackle. He has no connected story to keep our attention centered on its development in a logical sequence of events. His problem is to establish friendly relations with our sense of humor, to start us laughing with him and to let the indulgent mood he has created serve to keep the story together while he has given us plenty of fun for one sitting. More, then, than is the case with a serious script which can hold our interest by the progression of connected story incidents, is it up to the director to make a successful picture out of a script basically nonsensical.

Director Is Up Against It . . .

0 NLY a director with sound knowledge of audience psychology and a lively sense of humor could have made this Century picture such an amusing bit of entertainment as it proves to be. I can not recall having seen a previous picture directed by Otto Preminger, know nothing of his background or what training he has had, but he goes down on my list of directors whose future pictures I will look forward to viewing with anticipation of being satisfactorily entertained. He gives us a delightful mixture of fast moving fun. Danger is not a big production—just one of the class B program-fillers with which a director has to struggle manfully to get anywhere under the handicap of studio indifference, abbreviated shooting schedule and meager cost budget. To hurdle such obstacles and finally to reach class A importance, is a herculean task for a director to accomplish. Preminger seems equal to it. He was given no big boxoffice names to make the picture important enough to get into the big houses, but audiences in houses which do get it will hail it with glee.

Ann Sothern Delightful . . .

OUTSTANDING in the cast is Ann Sothern, whose performance amply justifies her first billing. Her keen appreciation of comedy values holds the whole thing together, the combination of her charming personality and acting ability being the picture's chief asset. Although delightfully irresponsible, the girl she plays is not quite so nutty as the other members of her most amazing family. The daughter of Mary Boland and the niece of Margaret McWade, Margaret Seddon, John Carradine, Walter Catlett, Maurice Cass and Etienne Girardot, Ann really is surprisingly sane. Jack Haley, who has business contacts with the family, is driven almost as mad as its members. Eddie Horton, not quite so screwy and a lot more devilish than usual, gives a good performance. Bennie Bartlett again proves what a clever boy he is, and amusing contributions are made by various others. There is one song which shares the picture's title. It is by Mack Gordon and Harry Revel, and it strikes me as having all the elements which make for popularity. James Edward Grant and Ben Markson turned out a highly meritorious screen play, and to Virgil Miller for his photography, Duncan Cramer for his art direction, and Jack Murry for his film editing goes credit for examples of expert screen craftsmanship.

AFFORDS AN EXPERIENCE . . .

● EBB TIDE, Paramount picture and release; Lucien Hubbard production; directed by James Hogan; screen play by Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne; photographed by Ray Rennahan; associate, Leo Tover; special photographic effects by Gordon Jennings; musical direction, Boris Morros; musical score by Victor Young; song by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin; art directors, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; film editor, Leroy Stone; interior direction by A. E. Freudeman; costumes by Edith Head; assistant director, Hal Walker. Castr. Oscar Homolka, Frances Farmer, Ray Milland, Lloyd Nolan, Barry Fitzgerald, Charles Judels, Charles Stevens, David Torrence, Lina Basquette, Harry Field.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

MAJESTY of the sea, the lazy charm of far-away islands, and the thrill of adventure are exuded by Ebb Tide, the new Paramount picture in Technicolor, directed by James Hogan. One comes away from the theatre refreshed and stimulated by his sojourn among the verdant growth of the South Sea Islands and by some wondrous days at sea, with his face against the wind, a great bowl of blue sky overhead and stretching out on all sides the green carpet of the ocean. To say that, viewed as a whole, Ebb Tide marks an advance in the Technicolor process, would an untruth, for some few scenes are hardly up to the standard set by earlier pictures. Other scenes, however, are impressively beautiful; and certainly the most dramatic use the screen has made of color is to be found in the typhoon scenes, where the fierce waves lash frenziedly on the old Golden State and its crew scurries here and there in a frantic effort to save the ship. Here Technicolor proves itself admirably suited to action. Victor Young has set the sequence to a musical score which is fury incarnate. The audience was stirred and responded warmly at the conclusion of the scenes.

Performances Are Vivid . . .

THARACTERIZATION, however, is the most onotable feature of Ebb Tide. Oscar Homolka, the European star, turns in an altogether splendid performance as the dissolute Captain Thorbecke, a piece of work both vigorous and finely shaded, and in its effect upon the audience, both repugnant and touching. Of equal excellence, if not even more expressive in cinematic terms, is the characterization given by Barry Fitzgerald of the drunken, bawdy, and conniving Huish. It is a characterization of many facets, and in none of them is there a false note. Ray Milland turns in a sensitive portrayal of the young beach comber, and Lloyd Nolan plays with admirable polish and conviction a mad collector of pearls, who rules like a tyrant the island at which the others are forced to land for lack of food. Only the characterization of Frances Farmer remains vague in my mind. She is smooth in the part and meets the emotional qualifications ably; perhaps the trouble lies in the story, for a refined young girl is rather a discrepant note on an old schooner. Perhaps the explanation is to be found partly in an observation of Mr. Beaton that the make-up of men fares much better in Technicolor than that of women. David Torrence

and Lina Basquette are among others seen to advantage. The keen imagination of Director Hogan, of course, can be seen behind all of the characters.

Screen Play Afforded Problem . . .

NOT having read the original story by Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, I cannot make a comparison of it with the film version, but I suspect that, despite the adventurous nature of its plot, it is heavy with symbolism, carrying an overtone of implications relative to the mind and soul. Bertram Millhauser, then, in doing the screen play, must have faced some problems in selecting the elements to incorporate into it. Besides the limitations of time facing him—and the film is already rather long—he must have realized the fact that the screen is not a medium for philosophy, in the literary sense, but one in which ideas, to be effective, must be translated into visual terms. Philosophical observations are made by the characters now and then, but what they say does not have time to "sink in" with the audience before other visual impressions command its attention. At any rate, one feels that there is significance in the behavior of the characters and their relations to each other that has not been fully expressed. I should like to see some further editing done on the picture. The first part is too slow in movement and too long. One feels that a climax is nearing after the typhoon scene, during which the captain pulls himself together from a drunken stupor, when suddenly the story takes a new course, entering upon its most interesting phase—that on the island of the eccentric pearl collector, affording some gripping situations. The drunken scenes between the captain and Huish in the first part of the film could be cut considerably, as well as some tour de force shots, such as a garnished roast pig on a platter, and various superfluous scenic views. Some elimination of dialogue in this early part would also be advantageous.

Film Is Color Conscious . . .

WEAKNESS of Ebb Tide as a color picture is A that, like most of its predecessors, it is "color conscious," too frequently employing color for striking effects, rather than subordinating it to the story. Doubtless some of this overemphasis is unavoidable, since all color work is still more or less experimental. Yet too many scenes savor of tour de force. There are attempts to arrive at impressive, perhaps significant, color blends in the sea episodes which are not altogether successful. Blue is over-used to the point of monotony. Changing tones of color in sky and sea in consecutive shots, due, I am told, to altering atmospheric conditions, is disconcerting, and indicates further problems for the Technicolor cameramen. On the whole, however, Gordon Jennings, doing special photographic effects, and Ray Rennahan, photographer, have got a great deal of richness onto the screen. One has only to see the golden fish swimming lazily through the green water at the beginning of the film, which forms the background for the titles, to anticipate what enjoyment the film is to bring,

and to realize the wealth of beauty that color can give to the screen. There is no denying that a shift of values is involved in appreciating color on the screen, but once the adjustment is made the rewards are great. Personally, I have no doubt that an increasing number of films are going to be made in color. Not that there will not always be black and white films. There are things that can be said in an etching that cannot be said in oils.

COLLEGE LIFE AS IT ISN'T . . .

● LIFE BEGINS IN COLLEGE, 20th-Fox picture and release; Darryl F. Zanuck in charge of production; associate producer, Harold Wilson; directed by William A. Seiter; screen play by Karl Tunberg and Don Ettlinger; suggested by a series of stories by Darrell Ware; music and lyrics, "Big Chief Swing It," "Our Team Is on the Warpath," "Fair Lombardy" and "Why Talk About Love," by Lew Pollack and Sidney D. Mitchell; "Sweet Varsity Sue," by Charles Tobias, Al Lewis and Murray Mencher; Ritz Brothers specialties by Samuel Pokrass, Sidney Kuller and Ray Golden; photographed by Thomas Little; assistant director, Charles Hall; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes by Royer; sound by Arthur von Kirbach and Roger Heman; musical direction, Louis Silvers, Cast: Three Ritz Brothers, Joan Davis, Tony Martin, Gloria Stuart, Fred Stone, Nat Pendleton, Dick Baldwin, Joan Marsh, Jed Prouty, Maurice Cass, Marjorie Weaver, Robert Lowery, Ed Thorgersen, Lon Chaney, Jr., J. C. Nugent, Fred Kohler, Jr., Elisha Cook, Frank Sully, Norman Willis.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

AGAIN we are asked to believe—all in fun, of course—that American college students are a bunch of empty-headed, constantly mischievous, over-dressed, young boors, who do nothing during their four years but wave pom-pons, yell, play practical jokes, and generally deport themselves in a manner which would be unbecoming to a high school sophomore. The true spirit of campus life, the objectives of higher education, the integrity of most students, and the endeavors of the many fine men and women who devote their lives to furthering knowledge and disseminating it—all are violated, held up as hypocritical and tawdry; and this is supposed to be funny. Football is given a great emphasis and it is expected that, being released at the height of the football season, the picture will pack in the public. Perhaps the football contagion will help the picture to draw, but my prediction is that all but the most superficial college students, and most persons who have been to college, will resent the picture. This false tone of the film, in fact, I believe to be partly responsible for the not too warm reception given it at its preview, which was before an audience generally responsive.

Some Eggs Are Laid . . .

LIFE BEGINS IN COLLEGE marks the debut of the Ritz Brothers as a starring trio. They work hard and some of their antics are funny, but it can scarcely be said that it is their picture. One does not seem to miss them when they are off the screen. And not a few of their antics, in the parlance of show-business, "lay eggs." In justice to the comic brethren, of course, it must be said that some of their specialty

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material is weak, and not carefully enough staged with regard to camera and microphone. Moreover, the story itself is not one suitable for setting off the trio, since the plot centers not around them, as it should, but about a boy-and-girl romance and an approaching football game. Too, they are presented as college students, for which they are manifestly too mature. Nor could some of the things they are called upon to do during the course of the picture be expected to win them audience favor. A green and rather dense Indian student-whom young Indians will resent-comes out of Oklahoma to enroll at dear old Lombardy, his pockets bulging with thousands of dollars, revenue from his oil wells; a fact which he wishes to conceal, however, so that his relations with the other students may be on a normal basis. The kindly Ritz boys, though—also tailors, by the way -discovering his wealth, charge him three prices for a suit of clothes, and after being entrusted with some thousands of dollars which the Indian wants to donate to the school, go on a spending spree and equip themselves with fur coats, swanky roadsters and what not. Is dishonesty supposed to be funny too?

Their Acting Too Physical . . .

NEVER have I regarded the Ritz Brothers as being able to carry a picture on their own, anyway. It seems to me they have never grasped the essential nature of the motion picture. Since their material has nearly always been cleverly conceived and executed with remarkable agility, their contributions to previous films have been diverting interludes, made especially so by being well "spotted," and mostly in films that were in themselves above the average. But the Ritz boys apparently do not understand the searching propensity of the camera, what it demands of a player in the way of thought and emotion, if he is later to make a true appeal to audiences. Everything they do is physical. The audience never gets to know them as personalities, it never feels that they are its friends. The Marx Brothers understand the camera, perhaps instinctively, but they understand it. I think, too, the Ritz trios' frequent emphasis of effeminate characteristics in their comedy is unwise. Motion picture audiences have never gone much for such stuff.

Production Methods Faulty . . .

Lew Pollack and SIDNEY D. MITCHELL have provided most of the music and lyrics. It all seems efficiently done, but does not stand out, partly because of production methods. Why Talk About Love? may rate public favor. Sweet Varsity Sue, by Charles Tobias, Al Lewis, and Murray Mencher, is also tuneful. There are no very elaborate production numbers. One song specialty done by the Ritz Brothers, in which they portray the spirit of '76, is very effective. But as for the others—it is senseless to set up a camera for a long shot, place an artist in front of it, and bid him go into a specialty number. The spectator simply cannot follow the words, and there he sits with his teeth in his mouth. What can be done about it is a problem we shall leave as home work for the youngsters returning to

school this month who will use the Spectator for motion picture appreciation courses. At any rate, both Joan Davis' numbers and those of the Ritz Brothers suffer in effectiveness from improper production methods. Among the large cast Gloria Stuart, Fred Stone, Dick Baldwin, Joan Marsh, and Nat Pendleton are outstanding, though the latter loses his Indian accent entirely in one scene. Tony Martin sings pleasantly, but has no part in the story. William A. Seiter directed in a manner which realized all the values made possible by the script and the players at his disposal.

ENTERTAINING LITTLE SHOW . . .

● FIGHT FOR YOUR LADY, RKO; producer, Albert Lewis; director, Ben Stoloff; story, Jean Negulesco and Isabel Leighton; screen play, Ernest Pagano, Harry Segall and Harold Kusell; photographer, Jack MacKenzie; music director, Frank Tours; film editor, George Crone. Cast: John Boles, Jack Oakie, Ida Lupino, Margot Grahame, Gordon Jones, Erik Rhodes, Billy Gilbert, Paul Guilfoyle, Georges Renavent, Charles Judels, Maude Eburne, Charles Coleman.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

STRANGELY enough, John Boles and Jack Oakie make a good team, one contributing the exuberance, the other the grace for their scenes. Together they put on an entertaining little show in Fight for Your Lady. That is, it will prove entertaining if you can check your sense of credibility at the door, for the story. I warn, is rather far-fetched. There are various attractions about the film, however, including some appealing vocal renditions by the accomplished Boles, and the charm of Ida Lupino, even though her foreign accent is somewhat flexible. There are many inventive gags, most of which are gotten off by Oakie in his inimitable, blustering style, a representative one being the comedian's observation, "There are two things you can't hide—love and a wart on the end of your nose." The yarn concerns a young American tenor in London, who, jilted by his actress fiancee, goes to Budapest and engages in a flirtation with a beautiful cafe entertainer, whose boy friend, a nobleman, is notorious for his policy of slicing up with his rapier any men who dare to admire her. Boles, of course, is deliberately engaging in the amour to find a way out of his miseriesuntil he realizes he really loves the girl. Apparently the situation was suggested by a recent incident in the news, in which the protagonist had just such a dueling proclivity. Oakie, as an athletic trainer, engineers his employer in and out of difficulties.

It Has Too Many Authors . . .

THE fact that the story is marred by poorly motivated and incredible situations, that it fluctuates between comedy drama, farce, and slapstick, is small wonder, since five authors had a hand in creating it. Clever touches are present in the story, however, including the opening scene, a satirical view of an English wrestling match, in which the wrestlers, going listlessly through their routine, discuss the spectators, the device serving to introduce Boles and his fiancee, Margot Grahame. A new song is featured,

sung by both Miss Lupino and Boles, Blame It on the Danube, by Harry Akst and Frank Loesser, a very pleasant waltz. Erik Rhodes again registers with his swaggering, pseudo-nobility brand of comedy, and gay scenes are also contributed by Georges Renavent and Billy Gilbert, one of the best of our comic actors. Gordon Jones is well cast. The Budapest interior sets, by Van Nest Polglase and his associates, if rather bizarre, are attractive and atmospheric. Ben Stoloff, director, has kept the action smooth, the spirit light. Fight for Your Lady was produced by Albert Lewis, who has many worthy pictures to his credit. He has given this one a complete and visually imposing production. Jean Negulesco and Isabel Leighton are responsible for the amusing original story.

JOE CHALKS UP ANOTHER . .

● FIT FOR A KING, RKO release of David L. Loew production; produced and directed by Edward Sedgwick; starring Joe E. Brown; screen play by Richard Flournoy; musical score by Arthur Morton; art direction by John Ducasse Schultze; photographed by Paul C. Vogel; sound recorded by Tom Carman; film edited by Jack Ogilvie. Supporting cast: Helen Mack, Paul Kelly, Harry Davenport, Halliwell Hobbes, John Qualen, Donald Briggs, Frank Reicher, Russell Hicks, Charles Trowbridge.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

NCE again Joe E. Brown comes through with the type of circus, a potpourri of harrowing stunts, gags, slapstick and romance, that has won for him a large and constant following. It is naive stuff, but good clean fun, is this buffoonery, and the kids will like it. Apparently many adults will too, for the reaction of the preview audience was one of high amusement and frequent excitement. I think the wide popularity of Joe's films can be accounted for by the fact that they come nearer to filling the place of the old Harold Lloyd pictures than any others on the market. The farce-stunt type of picture has been singularly neglected since the advent of talkies, though it is essentially good cinema, of its kind, and will always find public response. In the present film, the screen play of which is by Richard Flournoy, the comedian is a fledgling news reporter, who, through circumstance, is sent to Europe to trail a mysterious archduke. After harrowing experiences he uncovers a plot to assassinate the archduke and a young girl who is heir presumptive to the thrown of a mythical kingdom. The whole thing is told in a loose and episodic manner, but it holds interest and climaxes effectively, largely because the action is rapid and the situations, if not always original, are substantial. Gags follow each other in swift succession, a few slightly moth-eaten, but others intriguingly ingenious. It would seem that credibility has nothing to do with the case, so why bring that up?

Some Hilarious Moments . . .

ON the contrary, the gamut of the incredible is run, Joe masquerading as a chamber maid at one moment, beaning the lovely Helen Mack over the head with a vase the next. An hilarious moment is when most of a hay wagon, being speedily driven by him,

gradually falls away onto the road, leaving him perched precariously in the air on the driver's seat, riding on two wheels. A scene in pantomime in which, because of a storm at sea, he is tossed from one side of the brig of a ship to another along with the furniture, is funny, but might profitably be shortened. The chasm-mouthed comedian is in good form, playing with gusto and bringing forth all his repertoire of tricks. As the romantic interest, Helen Mack is comely and engaging. Paul Kelly's part as the rival reporter who constantly "scoops" Brown, takes him into broad comedy, the first role of this sort I have seen him play. It gives a new slant to his personality, and suggests a new field for his talents. Some first-rate comedy is contributed by John Qualen, seen as a slow-witted bicycle repair man engaged to repair a telephone. Harry Davenport is excellent as an archduke, and Donald Briggs pleases in a poised performance of a prince. Edward Sedgwick has directed with a keen eye for comedy possibilities, and Jack Ogilvie, film editor, has apparently done a yeoman's work in piecing it all together.





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CLASS B DIRECTORS

MANY of the best directors in Hollywood make the most badly directed pictures. They work under conditions which make it impossible for them to produce the best results. This week I received a personal letter from a screen writer who comes to the defense of class B directors. It impressed me so much that I phoned the writer for permission to publish it. As the screen writer had no wish to project himself into a controversy on a matter in which he had no personal interest, he granted me permission to publish his letter if I did not reveal his name. The letter follows:

WITH particular interest I read the paragraph in a recent Spectator entitled "Are Directors Slipping?" You added the following lines to Alfred Hitchcock's statement: "Hitchcock might as well argue that a man who selects a canvas, buys the color and brushes and picks out a landscape, contributes more to the painting than the artist who paints it." In many cases, or, if we must talk in motion picture language, in the B picture case, I definitely say that Hitchcock is right. The artist who paints contributes less to the painting than the man who selects a canvas, etc. If Henri Matisse had been obliged during the 1905 period to paint against his principles, that is, to neglect absolutely his decorative arrangements and paint a plate full of string beans in "outremer" color, he would not have been responsible for the result obtained. If Auguste Renoir had been obliged, by dire necessity, to paint the Eiffel Tower upside down in cobalt, could he have been blamed? If an employer had forced Edouard Manet to paint a dead pig in canary yellow for publicity purposes when Manet was about to paint his portrait of "Mademoiselle Victorine," would Manet be responsible? If Utrillo, Cezanne, Corot, Braque, Pissaro, Toulouse Lautrec, Pascin, Amadeo Modigliani, Steinlen, Vlaminck or Laurencin had all been employed at the same time, and had as their boss a sign painter, who told them what to draw and how to draw it, would they have achieved their greatness?

Could Express Personality . . .

PERHAPS you remember the scene of Murger's La Boheme where Marcel, obliged to earn a few sous, has to paint the front of a little bistrot and gets so disgusted with the work imposed upon him that he breaks his one and only clay pipe. Of course the painters believed in their art and many of them preferred to starve rather than to compromise. In 1919, for a plate of soup, Modigliani painted the faces of the customers in a little cafe in Nice. He painted them as he wanted to paint them and not as he was told to paint them. He could have made a better living had he done what he was told to do. He died of sickness and starvation. In the silent days a good director could express his personality. The cinema was then becoming an art, and any movie patron could go into the theatre, and after seeing a few

feet of film, know that the picture had been directed by Murnau, Pabst, von Sternberg, Cecil B. deMille, Henry King, Ernst Lubitsch, Leni, Seastrom, Stroheim, or by any of the intelligent directors. Today it is impossible for anyone in the audience to mention the name of the director after seeing a few scenes of a talking picture, as they all look alike and have no style of their own. They are either magnificently produced or they are a B production. The secret of talking pictures is to get your people on the set, let them talk and talk and talk, sometimes in a long shot, sometimes in a medium or close two-shot, or in close-ups, with or without an "over the shoulder" shot, and then have them exit from the set and go to the next one to talk and talk and talk.

What They Are Up Against . . .

DIRECTORS of B pictures are given scripts already manufactured, already cast, and with sets already planted, and which have been left over from A productions. The music for B pictures comes from old sound track previously recorded. Most actors, just as unfortunate as the director, come from stock—young men playing old men's parts and vice versa. The director is allowed so much footage and so much time (I should say, "so little"). On Monday he shoots three sets and on Tuesday five. He puts his actors through somber adventures and they go on murdering each other, sometimes until after the midnight supper. Importance of B directors is so much on the wane and the producers are so much the domi-

PROFITABLE HERE AND ABROAD...

(From Hollywood Spectator, September 25)
.... These stories could be made into a long series of box-office pictures. For the part of Phantomas I can see but one man, Bela Lugosi. I do not know Lugosi personally, but he is an admirable actor, famous throughout Europe where his name would mean much at the box-office, and his mastery of his art is so great he could make Phantomas live through a long series of pictures, which would prove profitable both here and abroad.

Dear Mr. Beaton:

My sincere thanks for the kind things you said about me.

I am available.
Yours very truly,
BELA LUGOSI.

nant factor, that I consider it unfair of the studios to give screen credit to the directors who are obliged to stage the kind of pictures they loathe and that they must do, that is, if they want to go on making a living. No one but the studio or the producer should be compromised by a screen credit which becomes an accusation instead of a credit. Half of the dialogue of our pictures could be dropped, and a happy compromise of silent and talking technique could be obtained. Of course if we had more action and less talk it would require more time (more setups) to shoot a picture and B pictures would be more expensive to produce. It is much faster work to photograph two people speaking five pages of continuous dialogue than to get five pages of interesting compositions and motion picture action. Of course, I do not have to add that the B director cannot even do the cutting of his pictures—he is lucky if he is admitted into the cutting room for a few minutes. Well, you know all about that also.

FOR BIGGER PROFITS By Mabel Keefer

THE dictionary defines the word "suggestion" as, I "The entrance into the mind of an idea or intimation, originated by some external fact or word which tends to produce an automatic response or reaction." That would seem to make the matter of suggestion rather important, wouldn't it? Consider, then, the tremendous force along the line of the power of suggestion that is stored up in the motion picture industry. What are we going to do with it? Man always has recognized that there are great forces in the universe, but only as he has learned the laws governing those forces has he been benefited by them. Job recognized the force of lightning, but he knew nothing of the laws governing it. It is only since men have studied and made use of these laws that we have been able to harness the force and direct it into channels of service. It might seem that the power of electricity and the power of the screen have nothing in common; that the importance of the former far outweighs that of the latter. I wonder?

Bucking Up Mankind . . .

WHAT would be the result of a serious study of the screen as a medium to buck up mankind, using wit, wisdom and humor as the tools for bettering minds and hearts? Someone has said that laughter is the human race's best medicine; that it chases away

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bacterial influences and sick thoughts. Surely the potentialities of the screen for administering this medicine cannot be surpassed, but laughter, if it is to have medicinal effects, must have medicinal qualities; it must be the result of wholesome emotions. As an example of what the screen can do in the spiritual realm: Was ever a better sermon preached than that in Captains Courageous, when Spencer Tracy talks to Freddie Bartholomew about the fishermen . . . and the Savior who was the best Fisherman of all? Ramon Navarro recently was quoted as saying, "They haven't touched on what pictures can do spiritually."

Esthetic Possibilities . . .

THE opportunity to combine beautiful scenery with beautiful music is unparalleled. And about that question of music-Shakespeare said that music can change the nature of a man, so maybe we'd better study the laws governing that force also—that is, the psychological effect of different kinds of music. But, the film industry cannot be intelligently considered apart from the box-office, and the question is, what effect would careful study of the situation with a view to learning the laws that govern this tremendous force, have on box-office receipts? Well, what has been the effect on the box-office or its equivalent in any other industry that has developed some great force and given it proper direction? And why shouldn't using the power of the screen to suggest a better and brighter mankind have the same resultincreased profits?

> Good Luck Welford and the Hollywood Spectator

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Twelfth Year

Los Angeles California—October 23, 1937

Vol. 12-No. 18

What Ails the Box-Office?

Alarming Falling off in Theatre Receipts From the General Run of Pictures Causing Exhibitors Much Concern; Movement to Increase Admission Prices not the Solution; Remedy Should be Applied at Source of Trouble, Hollywood Studios.

Strange Case of Young Actor Dr. Bruno Ussher Discusses Music Cantor's Latest Will Be a Big Hit

... REVIEWS ...

ALI BABA GOES TO TOWN

LIVE, LOVE AND LEARN

FAREWELL AGAIN

45 FATHERS

HOLLYWOOD ROUND-UP

SHE LOVED A FIREMAN

THE LADY FIGHTS BACK

THE THIRTEEN

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FOOD FOR SERIOUS THOUGHT . . .

THAT all is not well with the exhibiting end of the I picture business was made apparent in a couple of articles which appeared in a recent issue of the always reliable weekly Variety. Here is the opening paragraph of one of the articles: "Theatre operators and distributors are a little discouraged over the fact that a higher percentage of hit pictures this year, combined with conditions in general, isn't bringing an increase in total national gross over last year. Box-office statements show that while business is up over last year, at the same time it should be running much higher, in the opinion of those who express disappointment. Last year during August and September there were limited number of good pictures on release whereas this season there has been an unusual crop of boxoffice attractions for the playdating calendar. The great difference in quality of pictures should be creating a bigger difference in gross, operators feeling that business isn't up far enough, in view of the factors that figure to make it much more. A question which also concerns the students of the grossing charts is that while b.o. receipts total to slightly more than last year, at the same time theatres may be running ahead in dollars but not in attendance because of increases in admissions in various parts of the country. This thought is a bit disturbing, too."

What They Propose to Do . . .

WHEN we find that this season's big array of pictures of outstanding merit is not doing more than holding the box-office even with last year, we can quite understand why exhibitors' brows are becoming furrowed. Variety's second article tells what the exhibitors propose to do about it. A quotation from it: "Before the current (1937-38) season is over, it will be costing film fans much more to see pictures than it is now. As theatre operators everywhere begin to seriously consider experimentation with higher admissions, it is expected that this added burden for the public will be country-wide rather than sectional although for the next few months increased tariffs will probably be considerably spotty.... Higher rentals this season, coupled with payroll increases for other help in operation of theatres, greater cost of materials and other items are making it almost mandatory to try to get more from the consumer. The operators cite, among other things, that the cheapest thing the public buys today is theatre admissions and that this is one thing that hasn't gone up since the depression. Theory is that the public should expect to pay more."

What Constitutes Prosperity . . .

MOW that we have the situation so clearly set forth, IV let us see what we can make of it. To start with, I think the problem cannot be solved by an increase in admission prices. Say a horizontal increase of ten per cent is made. That merely would be asking the public to pay one dollar and ten cents for something it now refuses to buy for one dollar. Hollywood has perhaps a dozen stars whose names might bring in the extra ten cents, but for every extra dime that came in, I believe history would repeat itself and it would be just one less dime the run-of-mill product would bring in, consequently at the end of the first year of increased prices theatre operators would find themselves no better off than they are at present. As a matter of fact, theatre operators can do nothing to cure box-office sickness. Only Hollywood can do that. The sickness originates here, and only treatment at its source will cure it. Hollywood interprets picture prosperity in terms of studio activity, swimming pools and polo ponies. It can point to plenty of each. Hollywood certainly is prosperous today, but in the long run it can be no more prosperous than the most distant box-office. An industry cannot reckon its prosperity by its cash on hand. Its marker is its stability, its ability to carry on, the contented customers it has on its books. The most prosperous companies often are those which have to borrow most from their banks, and when their retailers cannot make a profit on their goods they do not tell them to raise the retail prices. They give serious thought to what ails the goods.

Public Finally Getting Tired . . .

MANY predictions have been made by the Specta-In tor during the nearly a dozen years of its existence and an extraordinarily large percentage of them have been fulfilled. But one it made did not come true. When it realized that Hollywood had made complete the camera's surrender to the microphone, it predicted that within a year the folly of the abandonment of motion pictures and the substitution of

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No Conto

talkies as the industry's only product, would become so apparent that producers would get back into the motion picture business and relegate the microphone to its proper place as an incidental aid to screen entertainment. I find now that in making the stipulation as to time so definite, I paid the intelligence of producers an unmerited compliment. I made the prediction seven or eight years ago, and since then time slowly has been coming to my rescue as a prophet. I had overestimated the intelligence of producers and underestimated the lasting power of the public, but I refuse to concede that the rest of the prediction, the part that really counts, was wide of the mark. It is coming true now. The public is getting tired of taikies, tired of ceaseless chatter, tired of having dinned into its ears mechanical noises of every conceivable kind.

No Substitute for Screen Brains . . .

WHILE exhibitors are pondering the wisdom of increasing admission prices to pay the bill for Hollywood's folly, Hollywood itself should come to its senses and make pictures which would permit exhibitors to lower admission prices and still make the industry and themselves more prosperous than they ever have been. Hollywood never has had the faculty of being able to think in terms of its business. It never has known what it has for sale. Three-thousand-dollar-a-week executives make a picture and then eliminate a scene from it because a barber's wife sends a preview card stating she did not like it. A one-hundred-dollar-a-week person with picture sense could have read the script and told the executives if the scene belonged in the completed picture. The film industry cannot continue to sell to the public a substitute for screen brains. That is what it has been doing, and now, in their desperation, exhibitors are threatening to save themselves by charging more for the substitute than there would be a legitimate reason for charging for the real thing if they could get it. There can be but one conclusion reached by anyone with brains enough to analyze the situation, and that is that unless the film industry speedily gets back into its legitimate business, Hollywood's pretty house of cards is going to come tumbling down. That is not just a wild guess.

Have Been Buying Packages . . .

ONE does not have to guess about pictures. This morning's Los Angeles papers tell of the great sums picture producers are about to spend in raising Westerns to the dignity of class A pictures which will get into the biggest houses. In the first year of its existence the Spectator raised its infant voice in a plea for recognition of the Western and at intervals since has advised producers to do exactly what they are doing now. But, producers will tell us, the time was not ripe; it is only now that the public demands Western pictures. Of all the damned rot uttered about pictures, the silliest is that there are recurrent shifts in fundamental human emotions. We want variations in the package in which our entertainment is presented to us, but unless the entertainment itself

appeals to something in us which our great-grandfathers had and our great-grandchildren will have, we are apt to lose our confidence in anything offered in a similar package. Hollywood has been offering us glittering packages in the way of spectacles, dance ensembles, music, and with a stubbornness which has kept the film industry alive, we have bought package after package because of the outward glitter. But the box-office shows we are getting tired of it all, that we are buying only the packages with the most brilliant wrappings and our neglect of the others is eating up the profits on the ones we buy. Apparently we are coming into a Western era. For a time it will be a flourishing era, but Hollywood will kill it because it does not know why Westerns appeal to us, does not know why silent pictures became popular, does not know the difference in appeal between a motion picture, with a little talking and no mechanically produced noise in it, and a talkie with little motion and as much noise as possible. One producing organization which would allow the picture brains on its payroll to function, would find itself doing more business than all the others combined. And exhibitors would be able to lower admission prices, for as efficiency and intelligence make a cheaper working team than inefficiency and ignorance, pictures would cost less at their source and exhibitors would pay less for them.

WE MEET MR. McCARTHY . . .

ONE day last week I indulged the hero-worship complex that each of us has in some degree. I visited the United Artists lot in the hope of meeting one of the most distinguished persons in the United States. I was fortunate in encountering him between shots on the Goldwyn Follies set. I was introduced to him by Edgar Bergen, and I must have made a favorable impression upon him, for in the friendliest possible manner he insisted that I should address him as Charlie, not as Mr. McCarthy. He was not entirely at ease, he told me, as he could not accustom himself to the oddity of wearing top hat, white tie and tails in the daytime, but then, he sighed, Hollywood makes such queer demands on one in the name of art. Gary Cooper joined us and Charlie insisted that we should wait and see him do his stuff before the camera. So Gary and I were provided with chairs and watched Charlie and his friend Bergen go through their scene. In a dozen years I suppose I have seen thousands of scenes shot, but never before was I so fascinated with one. Gary and I tried to figure out why we were sitting there and getting a greater kick out of watching a piece of wood doing things than we could out of watching the world's greatest actor going through a scene. We knew it was Bergen's amazing cleverness that held our attention, but he himself seemed to be just another silent onlooker, and we had eyes only for Charlie. When the scene was finished, Bergen, still holding Charlie, joined us, and while we were talking a painter approached to put a dab of paint on Charlie's stomach. The con-

versation continued as Bergen lifted Charlie's shirt and the painter applied his brush. Bergen apparently was paying no attention to what was going on, but the instant the brush touched his stomach, Charlie shuddered violently and screamed, "Don't do that! It takes my breath away!" The painter nearly died from fright. And Bergen never even smiled.

ONE IN A DOZEN YEARS . . .

FOR twelve years I have been attending Hollywood previews. Last week for the first time I saw a preview audience in a film theatre dismissed and given rain checks because something went wrong with the projection apparatus. It takes an experience like that to remind one how efficient such machinery is. As we had not paid to get in, we could not ask for our money back, so Rob Wagner and I discussed the chances of success if we started a riot to get our gasoline back, but a couple of men of average height got between Rob and me and I lost him, not, however, before we had agreed that if the thing were going to happen every twelve years it eventually would become monotonous.

STRANGE CASE OF A YOUNG ACTOR ...

0 N a visit to New York five or six years ago, I caught the first night of Charles Hopkins' production of The Roof, by Galsworthy. The performance which impressed me most was that of a young English actor, and judging by the reviews I read next morning, the same performance impressed the leading critics. Again in New York about two years later, I saw part of Ziegfeld Follies, and told my companion that the male half of an American song-anddance team looked astonishingly like a young English actor I saw play a heavily dramatic role in the Hopkins production. My companion remembered the name of the English actor; we consulted the program and decided it was just a case of physical resemblance, as the dramatic actor certainly was English and the Follies singer and dancer just as obviously American. Not long after that I saw the picture So Red the Rose, directed by King Vidor, and was impressed by the performance of a young fellow, obviously a Texan, playing a Texan part. The strange thing about it was that he looked astonishingly like the other two fellows—the American song-and-dance man and the English dramatic actor—but the Texan accent was too authentic to be turned off or on at will, so the picture fellow could not be either of the others. So I reasoned. But the Texan cowhand was the two other fellows. I learned of it only this week, my informant being a man who worked with King Vidor on So Red the Rose. His real name is Robert Cummings and he is a young player under contract to Paramount.

Versatile Young Fellow . . .

TUMMINGS has appeared in several Paramount pictures I have reviewed. When I first saw him on the screen I wrote that he was destined to go far

in pictures. Performances in little productions in which he appeared have convinced me he is one of the most brilliant of the current crop of aspirants for stellar screen honors, an opinion which Paramount apparently does not share with me. And when I recall what I saw him do on two New York stages, I am more than ever convinced that my prediction of a brilliant screen career will be fulfilled. Paramount has scouts out searching for talent when it has on its studio payroll a young actor whose record proves him to be one of the most accomplished actors available to pictures, but whom we have not seen in a part which would give him an opportunity to bring himself sharply to our attention. I do not know Cummings personally. I must meet him and get the complete story. All I know is that he tried to get a job on the New York stage at a time when it was thinking in terms of English plays and players; that as young English leading men were in demand, Cummings went to England, learned by contact to be an Englishman, gave himself an English name—something with "Stanhope" in it, if I recall it correctly broadcast through the mails to New York play producers that he was coming to America; found on arrival that seemingly every producer wanted him; Charles Hopkins won him—and the first night he went on in The Roof was the first time in his life he had faced an audience. And next morning Cummings' name—that is, the name he was using at the time-went on the marquee. How he became one of New York's outstanding song-and-dance men I do not know. But I do know that if I were a picture producer and had him on my payroll, I would cash in on him by developing all his possibilities.

PUBLICITY DEPARTMENTS, ATTENTION! . . .

FROM Detroit comes a note from Jack Hurford, manager of the Fox Theatre there, which expresses his satisfaction with the Spectator, and then he writes: "Attached you will find a tear-sheet from one of the Detroit papers containing a story from the Spectator, September 18th issue, dealing with the recording of 100 Men and a Girl. Possibly if the studio publicity departments would issue more stories like this in their press books, instead of the routine store tie-ups and dry readers, the exhibitor would occupy more news space on his feature. Keep up the good work."

HER LOSS OF POPULARITY . . .

DAILY VARIETY two or three weeks ago reported an interesting case of the dwindling popularity of a young character woman. It said that at one picture house fifty-one women in one evening turned away from the box-office upon receiving an affirmative answer to their question as to whether the young woman was in the cast of the feature, and that at another house the same thing happened in the case of twenty-one women. At the Fox West Coast office other house managers turned in similar reports. The young character player referred to is

Martha Raye. Variety attributed her loss of popularity to the publicity given her recent divorce. If that were the cause, there would be an alarming dwindling of attendance all along the line, for the divorces of many other young screen players were given about the same kind of publicity as that accorded Martha's. I am not an authority on divorce publicity, but I could see nothing in the headlines which made the Raye-Westmore untangling revelations particularly unsavory. As a matter of fact, most of the house managers were of the opinion that Martha had screamed herself out of popularity, and that is something I predicted in the Spectator nearly a year ago. She was presented as a freak, and thus far in the history of the screen, no freak has possessed anything more than temporary box-office value. In Martha's case, the stoutest ears eventually will resent the assault made upon them by her unmusical shouting. Paramount should know that.

Screen Art Always Box-Office . . .

PRODUCERS can scoff at screen art and protest that picture producing is a business and nothing else. The business is one of selling screen art, and, in the final analysis, the degree in which the laws of screen art are reflected in a film creation will be the degree in which the creation will bring the customers to the box-office. The screen is basically a silent art. Silence was the element which earned it worldwide popularity in such an amazingly short time. Since it became noisy, a million dollars must be spent to bring in as much money as a quarter-million-dollar picture brought in in the silent days; Martha Rayes are being paid big salaries for going crazy on the screen; huge spectacles costing fortunes are createdall such expedients are resorted to to achieve what a simple bit of honest screen art could achieve at quarter the cost. The Spectator subscription list is increasing so rapidly each issue has a considerable number of new readers. For those who have not read previous issues, I repeat what older readers have read so often: I do not advocate a return to wholly silent pictures; I advocate only that the camera should be the main story-telling medium and that the microphone should be used in a solely supplemental manner; that never should mechanical sounds be recreated to disturb the peace of picture houses; that the screen should present neither audible speech nor mechanical sound which the imagination of the audience could supply. A machine shop would be an interesting place to visit if it were not for the noise.

JACK BENNY AND BOX-OFFICE . . .

A rarious premieres I have caught scenes in Artists and Models, and every time I have become more convinced that Paramount would be doing itself a good turn if it presented him in a few smart comedies devoid of song and dance specialties. Jack is the perfect screen actor, which, according to the Spectator's conception of screen acting, means he has an ingratiating personality and the intelligence to adapt it to any

part he is called upon to play. He does not have to act. His sense of humor, the suggestion of meek acceptance of the role of victim of circumstances, the easy manner in which he captures the sympathy of the audience, and, above all, the real intelligence he brings to the job, would make him an outstanding box-office player who would not have to be presented in a setting of chorus girls, rhythm orchestras and dance ensembles. The secret of making the maximum amount of money out of a picture, is to keep its cost down to the minimum which marks the line economy cannot cross without making itself apparent enough to interfere with box-office quality. Jack Benny is strong enough to hold up a picture which does not have the added cost of great sets and spectacles.

BOTH ARE DOING WELL . . .

WHEN I reviewed Dead End, I termed it Sam Goldwyn's "magnificent mistake." I thought it too somber to achieve popularity. In the big houses where it is first showing it is proving a big box-office success. The Road Back, another which I thought missed its mark, is bringing in about the average business of the houses in which it is shown. However, I do not take the box-office into account when I review a picture. I judge it from the standpoint of how well scenarist, producer, director and cast have developed all the values of the story material.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

 $\mathbf{T}HE$ dogs make as much fuss when we return from a quarter-hour's absence as they do when we have been away for half a day. . . . Would like to have a pipe like the one Lionel Atwill smokes in Lancer Spy; he lights it in every scene and never fills it once. ... Laid down for a nap; no luck; the two dogs had a fight on me. . . . For a writer, I have a very small vocabulary; it would be much smaller if it consisted only of words I can spell. . . . I think up most of these things while I am working in the garden; by the time I get inside I have forgotten all the really bright ones. . . . Interesting experience: an aftermidnight tour from the top scenery loft to the lowest engine room of Radio City Music Hall, New York; amazed to discover all the physical ramifications of entertainment on such a large scale; across the street, on the way home, was a flower-shop window with a gorgeous orchid in it; I looked at the orchid a long time, then back at the Music Hall, wondering which was the more notable creation. . . . Bobby, our grandson, who spent the summer with us, has gone back home; on the edge of a pansy bed is a brightred, iron fire engine, toppled on its side; we are leaving it there. . . . There is no finer manifestation of the better side of us than our wholehearted enthusiasm for football when autumn comes. . . . Westwood Village marquee: Tonight: On Such a Night, Double or Nothing. . . . Will some Spectator reader about to visit England please call me up from London? The longest telephone talks I have made were between Hollywood and New York; I wish to ex-

pand at the expense of the expander. . . . Dogs have so much sense that if they could read the newspapers they would cease being man's best friend. . . . I think I have put my white flannels and sport shirts away for the winter, but at the slightest suggestion of cooperation from the thermometer I am ready to break out again. . . . John, head waiter at the Beverly Brown Derby, is putting in a garden; I am his floral consultant; design flower beds with forks, spoons, olives and crackers and John goes home and does them. . . . Just happened to recall that Robertson's dog place on the Boulevard never smells doggie. . . . Freddie, the spaniel, always got excited when saddle horses passed our place; peered at them through the gate; the other morning on our usual walk Freddie spied a horse in a field; I waited while he approached it slowly and suspiciously; finally horse and Freddie touched noses; now when saddle horses pass our place, Freddie yawns.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

CENTURY PRESENTS CANTOR, ET AL . . .

 ALI BABA GOES TO TOWN, 20th Century-Fox; producer, Darryl F. Zanuck; associate producer, Laurence Schwab; director, David Butler; story, Gene Towne, Graham Baker and Gene Fowler; screen play, Harry Tugend and Jack Yellen; photographer, Ernest Palmer; music and lyrics, Mack Gordon, Harry Revel and Raymond Scott; music director, Louis Silvers; dance director, Sammy Lee; art director, Bernard Herzbrun; film editor, Irene Morra: assistant director, Ad Schaumer. Cast: Eddie Cantor, Tony Martin, Roland Young, June Lang, Louise Hovick, John Carradine. Virginia Field, Alan Dinehart, Douglas Dumbrille, Maurice Cass, Warren Hymer, Stanley Fields, Paul Hurst. Sam Hayes, Douglas Wood, Sidney Fields, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Charles Lane, Raymond Scott Quintet. Peters Sisters, Jeni Le Gon, Pearl

ONE of the finest bits of entertainment the screen has to its credit; by long odds the best picture in which Eddie Cantor has appeared, and my personal preference as the best musical-spectacle production of the season. Born in the fertile brains of Gene Towne and Graham Baker, with Gene Fowler to help develope it and Harry Tugend and Jack Yellen to make it into a screen play, the story is an ideal one for the medium in which it is expressed and the audience at which it is aimed. All our previous musical pictures had singing somebodies panting to produce shows on Broadway. They fairly smelled of greasepaint. In Ali Baba Goes to Town, Cantor takes an overdose of medicine, goes to sleep and dreams the story, dreams himself back across the centuries to ancient Bagdad, taking along with him and putting into effect there the New Deal and others of our quaint ideas about how a country should be run. The strength of a story which makes visual a dream, lies in the fact that its lack of logic as a story makes it plausible as a dream. When we see Eddie riding through the skies on a magic carpet, we cannot sit back and say it could not happen. Only a few nights ago my spaniel and I climbed a waterfall by grasping bits of foam.

Of Great Visual Beauty . . .

ONE thing you will bless Ali Baba for is its lack of a battalion of girls working out problems in geometry on the shining surface of a four-acre dance floor. And you will bless it further for its failure to present us with a group of comedians shouting wisecracks at one another, and Martha Rayes screaming hot songs at you. As a matter of fact, there are no comedians in Ali Baba. All the characters take it seriously, and that is what makes it so funny. The ancient setting permits of gorgeous staging, and Bernard Herzbrun, art director, gave his imagination free rein in designing the various sets, while Gwen Wakeling and Herschel dreamed costumes which made possible the composition of scenes of spectacular beauty. In a picture of the sort photography plays a large part, and Ernest Palmer's camera never failed in realizing the full artistic possibilities of the pictorial material at which it was aimed. To Laurence Schwab, associate producer, goes credit for a wonderfully well done job. There is just enough of everything; never for a moment does it drag, and as you leave the theatre you are going to be saying, "Why did it end so soon?" rather than, as is usually the case, "Why did it go on so long?" You will get the impression you have seen a short and snappy picture, yet its running time is 80 minutes.

Everything Refreshingly New . . .

THE physical attainments of Ali Baba, its voluptuousness, its scenic backgrounds, its great mob scenes, its lack of suggestion of a restricted budget, are matched in effectiveness by its human elements. Its specialties are new. We have not seen in any other production the interpolated numbers which make this one so outstanding. Most of the entertainers are colored people, and never have we had others who excelled them in their various lines. And there is newness in the script also. It reflects a lively sense of humor in conception and execution, and the dialogue is decidedly clever. Mack Gordon and Harry Revel contribute four songs which are up to the high standard set by them in previous screen productions. A feature of their work which I have noticed is that their lyrics are always about something, have literary and intellectual values which make them outstanding. More extended reference to the music of Ali Baba will be made by Bruno Ussher, the Spectator's music critic, in a subsequent issue. Eddie Cantor, looking young enough to be his own son and spry enough to suggest the lopping off of even more years, never on stage or screen gave a better performance than he does in this picture. He is the story's sole motivating force, everything is thrown to him, all the comedy lines are his, yet so skilful is he in handling his role, we never feel we are getting too much of him. Either he was in better voice than usual, or I had forgotten what an agreeable singer he is.

Dave Butler's Good Work . . .

THE various elements composing Ali Baba are blended into a harmonious pattern by the skilled direction of Dave Butler. It was a big job to tell smoothly, and keep continuous our interest in, a story which stops at intervals to take aboard a musical interpolation; and it was no easy task to create and sustain the Oriental mood, to preserve its dignity, its ceremonious atmosphere, but Dave was equal to it. He was fortunate in having his film pass through the cutting room over which Irene Morra presides as film editor. It was a formidable task to turn out such a smoothly running film, and the results achieved are a tribute to Miss Morra's skill. Tony Martin is another to whom praise is due. His singing voice and his manner of using it always delights me. Roland Young, Alan Dinehart, Douglas Dumbrille—the whole cast, in fact, with but one exception, give us a collection of performances which leave no room for adverse criticism. The exception is Gypsy Rose Lee, playing under her own name, Louise Hovick, who in her regular work must have proven herself a better actress from the neck down than she does in Ali Baba from the neck up.

WILL GIVE SATISFACTION . . .

● LIVE, LOVE AND LEARN, MGM: producer, Harry Rapf: director, George Fitzmaurice; story, Helen Grace Carlisle and Marion Parsonnet: screen play, Charles Brackett, Cyril Hume and Richard Maibaum: photographer, Ray June: music score, Edward Ward; film editor, Conrad A. Nervig; assistant director, Al Shenberg. Cast: Robert Montgomery, Rosalind Russell, Robert Benchley, Helen Vinson, Monte Woolley, E. E. Clive, Mickey Rooney, Charles Judels, Maude Eburne, Harlan Briggs, June Clayworth, Chester Clute, Barnett Parker, Al Shean.

WHAT matters about this one is that it is entertaining and should please all the audiences which assemble to see it. The critically minded might point out how it could have been made better, but we will let that go for the moment. Harry Rapf has filled Live, Love and Learn with production value, Cedric Gibbons and his staff having designed some particularly effective settings which Ray June has photographed with the artistic impressiveness which long has distinguished his work with the camera. And while I am dealing with the visual aspects of the picture I might as well add that in the persons of Rosalind Russell and Helen Vinson, the two girls most prominent in the story, we have beauty of face and form which also is easy on the eye. Much of the credit for the pleasing pictures the girls make goes to Dolly Tree, designer of the gowns they wear. The attire appealed to my untutored masculine eye as reflecting the best in artistic good taste, but do not ask me now what the young women wear. I despair of ever getting far enough in a gown-appreciation course to be able to perform that feat of memory. The sum total of all my impressions is that this Metro production reflects credit on all the technicians who had to do with it, and among them must be included Conrad Nervig for intelligent film editing.

Literary Mass Movement . . .

WHEN I see in the credits that five people had their fingers in the fashioning of a screen story, I wonder what would be the consequences if someone

should yell "Author!" when the fade-out comes. If the five arose together to take a bow, it might be accepted by the audience as the initial movement in a stampede to the exits, and that might have dire consequences. However, the danger was averted this time, not by lack of merit in the story, but because it is not the usual practice to ask the author to take a bow. The picture opens with a display of a whimsical mood which prepares us for another of those entertaining, irresponsible comedies which are such good fun. But the mood suddenly changes to a serious one and the story drags while the mind of the audience is adjusting itself to the slower tempo and becomes aware it is witnessing a serious social drama instead of the gay comedy it had been led to expect. In the final sequence there is a return to whimsy which is too brief to permit of the mental readjustment necessary to its full appreciation. It is a weak ending which does not send the audience away as satisfied as it would have been if the serious note had continued to the end.

Rosalind Russell Outstanding . . .

OF those in the cast, Rosalind Russell is entitled to chief honors. Her part is one of many emotional phases and she proves herself equal to all of them. To her good looks and good breeding she adds a fine sense of both comedy and dramatic values. Given a few more prominent roles in important productions, Rosalind Russell will develope into a big box-office favorite. Bob Montgomery's efficiency is much in evidence, but his part permits only of the standard leading-man characterization which he handles with his usual superficial dexterity which always makes me a witness of his joys and sorrows and never goes far enough to make me share them with him. Bob Benchley is an admirable comedian. Here he has a role which has an underlying serious note and he gives a really fine performance. Helen Vinson plays a vixenish school friend of Rosalind. The part as written struck me as being too brittle in its menace, and Rosalind's reaction to Helen's action seemed inconsistent with the character which the former had established. Early in the picture, Rosalind, as characterized, would have thrown Helen out on her ear, but the menace had to be maintained and Rosalind puts up with it even though we do not believe she would. E. E. Clive with his usual proficiency makes a little part play a big part in the production as a whole, and Monty Woolley, whom I cannot recall having seen before, also makes his presence felt. George Fitzmaurice gives excellent direction to the story as written, revealing both a keen sense of humor and full appreciation of the human values of the serious phases of his script.

WORTHY BRITISH OFFERING . . .

● FAREWELL AGAIN. London Films-U.A.; producer, Erich Pommer; director, Tim Whelan; story, Wolfgang Wilhelm; dialogue, Ian Hay; photographers, James Wong Howe and Hans Schneeberger; music score, Richard Addinsell; music director, Muir Mathieson; film editor, Jack Dennis; assistant director, F. Penrose Tennyson. Cast: Leslie Banks, Flora Robson, Se-

bastian Shaw, Patricia Hilliard, Anthony Bushell, Rene Ray, Robert Newton, Leonora Corbett, J. H. Roberts, Eliot Makeham, Martita Hunt, Robert Cochran, Edward Lexy, Maire O'Neill, Wally Patch, Margaret Moffatt, Gertrude Musgrove, Billy Shine, Alf Godard, Eddie Martin, Edmund Willard, Phil Ray, Janet Burnell, Jerry Verno, John Laurie, Vernon Harris.

QUITE a notable cinematic job, even though it is not a picture to attract large audiences in this country. But it is a picture which everyone in pictures should see—that is, everyone except Martin Ouigley, publisher of Motion Picture Herald, because it is propaganda for the British army and Quigley gets dreadfully annoyed when anyone even suggests the screen should carry a message of any sort. When viewed solely as an exhibition of screen technique, Farewell Again proves a fascinating subject. It has no direct story to invite our attention; it has no hero, heroine, villain. It has no plot with its logical sequence of events, with effect always following cause. A regiment of British cavalry is aboard a troop ship bound home to England after five years' service in India. The picture picks up the ship at Gibraltar, where a cavalry captain comes aboard and reports for duty. We journey with the ship on its four-day run up the coast of Europe to Southampton. Instead of the long leaves the men are anticipating after five years of the heat and dust of India, the situation in the Far East is so grave that officers and men have but six hours ashore before they again set sail for a distant outpost of the far-flung British Empire. That is the story.

Great Human Document . . .

WITH such story material Erich Pommer set forth to make a picture. Pommer, with a record behind him of having made a series of the greatest film productions ever to come from one man in Europe, made two attempts to duplicate in Hollywood the success he had achieved abroad, but our studio methods proved too much for him. Now teamed with Alexander Korda, another great producer whose genius also was not recognized when he was striving to accomplish something in Hollywood, Pommer has sent us a cinematic masterpiece it would profit us to study. Farewell Again is an emphatic demonstration of the truth of the Spectator's oft repeated contention that the story is not the matter of chief importance in a motion picture, that what counts is the use made of all the elements of the production. This British picture starts with a series of isolated shots in which various characters are planted in London. Who the people are or what the inter-relationship of the shots is, we are not told, nor are there any clews upon which we can base a surmise. Then the camera goes aboard the crowded troop ship where we see the cavalrymen, most of them single, some with wives and children. For four days we are shipmates of the soldiers, and gradually we become interested in them as a whole until we become conscious that we are witnessing the fashioning of a great human document consisting of a series of unrelated romances, dramas, tragedies and comedies, all woven expertly into a fascinating pattern.

Tim Whelan's Good Direction...

NOTHER Hollywood expatriate, Tim Whelan, A directed Farewell Again. Tim never got far over here. I remember having praised some of his first attempts and predicting a future for him, just as I had sung the praises of Korda and Pommer, and now I confess to a feeling of fiendish glee as I take advantage of the opportunity Farewell Again gives me to pay tribute to their craftsmanship. Whelan was given a crowded ship and an even dozen little human incidents, important to the audience only in the degree in which he enlists our interest in them, and has given us an intensely human picture containing one of the finest collection of performances it ever was my good fortune to see. The strength of the scenes comes from their repression. Players speak naturally, behave naturally and in no scene do we get an impression that we are looking at actors. The whole thing is a little too fine for our average audiences which view screen entertainment objectively. Most Americans are not interested in anything happening to a British cavalry regiment or in a picture whose cast does not include some established American players, but those who can enjoy fine screen craftsmanship for its own sake will find Farewell Again a highly satisfactory picture. Certainly no American production has given a finer husband-and-wife portraval than that of Leslie Banks and Flora Robson: and never have we had a nicer, sweeter romance than that of Sebastian Shaw and Patricia Hilliard. If no lump comes to your throat when Banks, as the colonel of the regiment, quietly waves farewell to the wife who he knows will die as a result of a lingering illness while he is serving his country on the other side of the globe-if such a scene, presented as beautifully as it is presented here, cannot move you, then Farewell Again is not for you. It is showing at the Four Star Theatre.

WESTERN BECOMES INTROSPECTIVE . . .

● HOLLYWOOD ROUNDUP, Columbia release of Coronet picture; produced by L. G. Leonard; directed by Ewing Scott; screen play by Joseph Hoffman and Monroe Shaff; dialogue by Ethel La Blanche; Mack Wright, production manager; photographed by Allen Q. Thompson; film edited by Robert Crandall; art direction by F. Paul Sylos; musical supervision by Morris Stoloff; sound recorded by Thomas A. Carman; Harve Foster, assistant director. Cast: Buck Jones, Helen Twelvetrees, Grant Withers, Shemp Howard, Dickie Jones, Eddie Kane, Monty Collins, Warren Jackson, Lester Dorr, Lee Shumway, Edward Keane and George A. Beranger.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

WESTERN with a sense of humor is the spec-A tacle presented by Buck Jones' new film, Hollywood Roundup. It turns in upon itself, so to speak, and views with a candid eye the props and processes by which pictures of its very kind come into being. It even now and then takes a playful poke-or are they always playful?—at the said props and processes. As the film opens, we are introduced to a typical Main Street theatre, with blatant posters in the front, tense youngsters in the front rows, and all. On the screen is flashing one of those sensational

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trailers, in which exciting epithets emerge in a minute state from the black void and rush to such gigantic proportions that they farely hit one in the face. Presently the Western idol appears, riding like all get out and dispersing a generous rain of bullets over his shoulder, all of which impresses the audience mightily. The next sequence, however, its locale in Hollywood, shows the idol, Grant Withers, bouncing in his saddle at the end of a support suspended from a truck. A pretty ugly picture is drawn of the fellow in actuality. Not only is he vain, overconcerned with a powder puff, but he is disagreeable, inclined to drink, scheming and cowardly. He is, in short, the villain. Buck Jones, who, as his double, has done all his stunts anyway, eventually achieves the starring position himself, the powder-puff hero's downfall coming about when he tries to usurp the praise for capturing a band of bank robbers which rightly belongs to Buck, and does not get away with it.

But Is Still a Western . . .

THE satire, though sometimes amusingly trenchant, is never subtle, and does not is never subtle, and does not serve to raise the film above the level of a glorified "horse opera." Nor was it intended to, the picture being designed, as Jones' former pictures have been, for the type of audience represented at the opening of the film. They will find Hollywood Roundup as exciting as its predecessors, and having an added interest because of its commentary on picture production. It is interesting to speculate upon what attributes or circumstances must be responsible for Buck Jones' long and still flourishing career as a top-ranking Western star, a career during which numerous contemporaries have come and gone from the silver screen. For one thing, I think he epitomizes the man of the West as few other players have done. Manly, of staunch moral standards, of simple manner, indeed rather plain, inclined toward seriousness, resourceful, if not nimble-witted, essentially honest and well-meaning, and not too good looking, he presents a figure which millions of farm men, laborers, and children in the small towns can recognize as a type representative of them, and into whose experiences they can readily place themselves. Moreover his acting, if never subtle, has always been characterized by sincerity, winning for his portrayals interest and sympathy. I suspect, too, that Jones has been unusually level-headed in managing his business affairs, as well as his private life. He fits snugly into his part of the patient and well-meaning double in Hollywood Roundup.

Ewing Scott's Direction Good ...

ALSO well cast is Helen Twelvetrees, appearing as a film star who has lost footing and finds herself cast in a "horse opera." Very effective is her scene wherein the president of the company breaks the news to her in his office, and she bravely fights back the tears. The prexy explains that the film is not really a "horse opera" but an "ourdoor special," which drew laughs from the picture-wise preview audience. We hope to see more of her. Grant Withers is capable as the movie hero, a part similar to that he did on the stage in Boy Meets Girl. Shemp Howard

shows himself a first-rate comic as the harried and vociferous assistant director. Dickie Jones gives a spirited account of the actress' kid brother, and Eddie Kane and Monty Collins are among others who are competent. An outstanding bit of work, imaginative and executed with admirable precision, is a comic interlude by George A. Beranger, as a movie aspirant demonstrating his wares. Ewing Scott, always a dependable and intelligent director, has kept the story moving along at a good pace, and reveals an eye for comedy in the telling. The original story and screen play were by Joseph Hoffman and Monroe Shaff, with Ethel La Blanche doing dialogue.

RICH IN SITUATIONS . . .

 45 FATHERS, 20th-Fox picture and release; directed by James Tinling; screen play by Frances Hyland and Albert Ray; based on a story by Mary Bickel; photographed by Harry Jackson; art direction by Albert Hogsett; assistant director, Jasper Blystone; film editor, Alex Troffey; costumes by Herschel; sound by W. D. Flick and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction by Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jane Withers, Thomas Beck, Louise Henry, the Hartmans, Richard Carle, Nella Walker, Andrew Tombes, Leon Ames, Sammy Cohen, George Givot, Ruth Warren, Hattie McDaniel, Romaine Callendar.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

TANIE WITHERS is getting to be a big girl now J and Associate Producer John Stone wisely selected a story in which she would be called upon to do the dramatic work of a girl befitting her age. The days of sweetness and angelicism are happily over for little Jane, and from now on she will be moulding the lives of elders instead of growing up under their guidance. 45 Fathers presents the Century juvenile in a happy mixture of fun and pathos, comedy and serious drama, and the Withers charge does nobly for all concerned. Briefly, the story concerns itself with the adoption of a helion South African by a staid jockey and sporting club. Jane is taken into the custody of one household in particular, that of Richard Carle. There, with the aid of two of her traveling companions, the Hartmanns, who take to domestic service in lieu of starving as vaudevillians, she confounds the marriage of self-seeking Louise Henry and nice young man Thomas Beck.

It Is Rich in Comedy . . .

AFTER several hilarious scenes, a courtroom sequence in particular, Thomas Beck is saved from the machinations of Louise Henry and her scheming mother, Nella Walker. As are all of Jane Withers' pictures, 45 Fathers is a comedy, but this time a comedy graced and blessed with some rib-tickling situations and fine performances. The work of Sammy Cohen, as the faun dancing Professor Ziska, and of singing teacher George Givot, as Professor Bellini, are outstanding. The Hartmans score nicely as the running comedy relief and should take their bow for the courtroom episode. Richard Carle is his usual excellent self. Ivan Simpson, an oldtimer and an old hand at pictures, belies his experience, however, by moving his lips while other players recite their lines, as if he were coaching them. In one sequence in particular in which he exchanges lines with Richard Carle, he silently recites every one of Carle's lines with his lips, much to the annoyance of the spectator. Thomas Beck, the reviewer would like to predict, will go far. His progress can be happily speeded by roles which will give a fuller opportunity to his obvious talents. A full measure of credit goes to the Writers Frances Hyland and Albert Ray who adapted the story from that of Mary Bickel. They have given 45 Fathers the benefit of clever writing and have charged it with colorful situations and good, snappy dialogue. Albert Hogsett deserves to be mentioned for his lavish sets which were designed and executed in good taste. James Tinling gave the picture the benefits of his careful direction.

ITS PLOT RATHER SLENDER . . .

● THE LADY FIGHTS BACK. Universal; associate producer. Edmund Grainger; director, Milton Carruth; screen play, Brown Holmes and Robert T. Shannon; from the novel, "Heather of the High Hand," by Arthur Stringer; photographer, Milton Krasner; special effects, John P. Fulton; art director, John Harkrider; musical director, Charles Previn. Cast. Kent Taylor, Irene Hervey, William Lundigan, Willie Best, Joseph Sawyer, Paul Hurst, "Chick" Chandler, Ernest Cossart, "Si" Jenks, Gerald Oliver Smith.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

HANDSOMELY mounted and directed, adequately enacted by a competent cast, The Lady Fights Back tries hard to get going, but never really manages it. Much of the static situation can be traced to a slender plot which revolves about two battling factions—Irene Hervey as the manager of a prosperous fishing lodge, and Kent Taylor, the young engineer who proposes to ease the club out of existence by diverting a plentiful lake catch. The battle seesaws with plenty of bufoonery and honest smacking to liven the show. Kent and Irene are alternately on top until a final compromise whereby the salmon, the fishbone of contention, are permitted to climb up Engineer Taylor's dam by way of a specially constructed salmon falls.

Dialogue Stands Out ...

 $m{T}^{HAT}$ is pretty slender fare to connect some smart acting and some smarter writing. Kent Taylor enacts his role with the usual suavity that bespeaks better things to come. Irene Hervey is convincing as the mountain hellcat. William Lundigan gave a fine portrayal as the other young man. Ernest Cossart is his old reliable self. Willie Best is fine comic relief. Chick Chandler is too consciously Lynne Overman. Si Jenks is still the village rustic, and a good one, at that. But special mention goes to Scenarists Brown. Holmes and Robert T. Shannon who have given the story the obvious benefits of good, clear dialogue. Milton Carruth exhibits some of his film editing background in a careful selection of sequences and direction. The careful interchanging of process, stock and regular shots in the canoe exteriors were capably handled by an unnamed film editor. Scollard Maas should be mentioned for his striking salmon club

COURSE IN PICTURE MAKING . . .

• SHE LOVED A FIREMAN, a First National picture; associate producer, Bryan Foy; original screen play by Carlton Sand and Morton Grant; directed by John Farrow; photography by L. Wm. O'Connell, A.S.C.; technical advisor, Captain Orville J. Emory; art director, Hugh Reticker; dialogue director, Jo Graham; assistant director, Elmer Decker; film editor, Thomas Pratt; sound by Stanley Jones; gowns by Howard Shoup; music and lyrics by M. K. Jerome and Jack Scholl. Cast: Dick Foran, Ann Sheridan, Robert Armstrong, Eddie Acuff, Veda Ann Borg, May Beatty, Eddie Chandler, Lane Chandler, Ted Oliver, Pat Flaherty.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

FTER She Loved a Fireman has hit the fourth A and fifth run houses and is generally withdrawn from public release, Producer Bryan Foy might use the picture to instruct younger producers and directors how to make a box-office B hit. From external evidences this picture was not an excessively expensive one, and it serves as an excellent example of what intelligent production can do to lift a B above its class. The direction by John Farrow and the noteworthy cutting by Thomas Pratt indicate a perfect harmony between the director's chair and the movieola, which is something of a rarity in itself. Stock shots were judiciously paired with some good studio scenes and harmonized to give a startling and acceptable story. The story itself need not detain. Dick Foran as the smart-aleck ward heeler gets into the fire department. He flips his way through duty and only the steadying influence of Robert Armstrong, as the firehouse captain, and his sister, Ann Sheridan, and a warm friendship for Eddie Acuff bring the headstrong Dick around.

Old Stuff Looks New . . .

B ASICALLY the plot is a repitition of what the audience has seen many times before. It was the problem of the writers, Carlton Sand and Morton Grant, to give their yarn some originality. They whipped some clear, smart dialogue into the story, refurbished the old wheelhorse with some fresh situations, and ended up with a story that will arrest the attention. She Loved a Fireman is eloquent testimony to the stand that B pictures of a small budget need not suffer from sloppy production, direction, writing or acting. Dick Foran is refreshingly fresh. Eddie Acuff plays his comic role with restraint. Ann Sheridan shows promise of finer things to come. Robert Armstrong gives his usual dependable performance. But this victory belongs to Director John



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Farrow and Film Editor Thomas Pratt. Let it be said parenthetically that the reviewers might have been disposed to even more generous criticisms of the film if the Forum Theatre projectionist had taken pains to regulate his sound properly. She Loved a Fireman screamed. In spite of that, however, the songs written by M. K. Jerome and Jack Scholl impressed one as having both lyrical and musical values.

FUNNY, IF YOU SPEAK SPANISH . . .

 JALISCO NUNCA PIERDE, distributed in the United States by Azteca Films, Los Angeles, California; original story by Chano Urueta and Ernesto Cortazá; directed by Chana Urueta; assisted by Roberto Gavaldón; photographed by Gabriel Figueroa; art director, José Fernandez; sound, José Rodriguez; screen adaption, Chano Urueta; musical direction, Lorenzo Barcelata; songs by Pepe Guizár and Lorenzo Barcelata; musical arrangement by Professor Manuél Esperón; dialogue collaboration, Guz Aguila; film editor, Jorge Bustos; producer, Luis Sanches Tello; estudios, Clasa. Star: Esperanza Baur. Cast: Jorge Velez, Carlos López "Chaflán," Pepe Gizár, Joaquín Pardavé, Emma Roldán, Pedro Armendariz, Lorenzo Barcelata.

Reviewed by Don Susano

MEXICAN directors display as much understanding of dramatic and comedy values as our own. Besides, Mexicans have a flare for screen acting and put across their characterizations with as much naturalness as if they were the people whom they portray. Jalisco Nunca Pierde is a western comedy of genuine Mexican ranch flavor as are its many tuneful cowboy songs. The singing is a treat, and the voices have a soothing quality of which we never tire. In summary, the daughter of a rich hacendado is in love with one of her father's cowboys. The father, however, has selected for suitor the son of his best friend. The suitor, in turn, loves another girl, the daughter of the village president. On the day of the wedding, in connivance with the village notary who performs the ceremony, the humble cowboy and the rich suitor turn into a double wedding what was to be a single wedding. Thus each marries the girl he loves. A hilarious scene results when the notary does his best to explain to the parents that, due to a slight error in signing the papers, the bride and the bridegroom were accidentally married to the two witnesses—the cowboy and the daughter of the village president.

Told with Sense of Humor . . .

THE whole production sparkles with droll humor. I The small, warty-faced village notary carries his mien with the importance of a city lawyer. The wife of the henpecked village president puts on airs of good breeding and overworks her vocabulary of long words to impress her neighbors. Carlos López, nicknamed "Chaflán," plays to perfection a lovable peon who keeps the audience in titters with his remarks. One finds such types in Mexico, fellows who are forever making the most unexpected but timely remarks. "Chaflán" is middle aged, has a humorous pussy face, split by a walrus mustache, and his body movements have a graceful languor. No question that he will become a favorite in Spanish films. Another who promises much because of his quaint comical

personality, is Joaquín Pardavé who portrays the village notary. In other Mexican productions the camera has shown more flexibility as a story-telling medium, but in this one it is practically a stationary mirror due to the excessive dialogue. The technic, too, is reminiscent of the Spanish stage, depending on the dialogue to enliven the story. However, when I think in English the Spanish remarks which I thought so funny, they seem meaningless in most cases. But the same is true when we translate strictly American humor into Spanish.

HARSH RUSSIAN REALISM . . .

● THE THIRTEEN; produced by Mosfilm, Moscow, U.S.S.R.; director, Mikhail Romm; scenario, Ivan Prut and Mikhail Romm; camera, Boris Volcheck; musical score, Anatoli Alexandrov; military consultant, Vladimir Afonski. Cast: Ivan Novosoltsov, Elena Kusnina, Alexei Christinkov, Areen Fait, Andrei Dolinin.

Reviewed by Don Susano

ITE have grown so accustomed to the same half-adozen or so plots upon which most of our movies are based, that subconsciously we expect every picture to conform to these accepted formulas. No wonder that an unusual plot stands out like a needle larger than its own hay stack. The Thirteen is an unusual plot. But we have seen it before in the Hollywoodmade The Lost Patrol. And whether or not the present story is an intentional copy of the former, the fact remains that it is an exact parallel even to its intensely dramatic treatment. In both stories a group of wandering soldiers take possession of a disputed water-hole in the middle of a sea of sand, miles and more miles from nowhere. Suddenly the enemy attacks in overwhelming numbers, but the soldiers manage to hold the water-hole. Nevertheless, one by one of the defenders are picked up by enemy snipers until but one remains, and he finally is rescued by belated reinforcements. As I remember, The Lost Patrol was presented subjectively, the spectator sharing every tense moment with the besieged. The same is true of this Russian production. We feel the anxiety of the thirsty soldiers as they watch the drops of water, leaking at the bottom of the well, filling a small can. We feel the oppressive heat. We taste the sweet, cool water as they ration themselves to three mouthfuls each. And we are worried when we see them emptly the precious liquid into the machine guns to keep them cool.

Is Intensely Dramatic . . .

THERE are views of several seconds' duration each, which convey a vivid struggle, although nothing alive appears in them. One sees merely stretches of undulating white sand lying still, like waves in a frozen ocean. But across them are the labored footsteps left by the soldier who was sent after reinforcements. Like most Russian pictures, there is a newsreel harshness to the photography which makes for realism. In fact, the presentation of the story is in a realistic tone. One instance: The wife of the commander, a woman in her early thirties, who, although attractive, looks like an ordinary housewife—and

throughout the story remains as badly buffetted by the heat and the trying circumstances as the men themselves. Is this realism? Yes! Because she does not look as if she were in constant touch with the beauty parlor. I am sure the public will enjoy more stories based on the water-hole idea, providing they are as intensely dramatic as The Lost Patrol and The Thirteen.

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

STUFF DREAMS ARE MADE OF . . .

HOW fraught with philosophical implications is the "back stage" of a motion picture set, that rough outer side, with its maze of supporting boards, coiling cables, props, and just plain dirt. I was impressed with this fact on a recent visit to Frank Lloyd's Wells Fargo set at Paramount, where I watched with fascination the players of the film leave this workaday region and pass through a doorway onto the elaborately decorative, luminous set. Many times, back stage in a theatre, I have watched players leave the realm of canvas, props, and dirt, to go onto the stage, another realm, a region of transport and beauty for the absorbed audience. Always the spectacle has been glamorous for me. But on the motion picture set the fascination arising from the movement of players from one realm to another arises from a different source. Here they go into a region of illusion which exists not merely for a few hundred persons, but for millions; they go onto the stage of the world. Once through those portals they become transformed by the magic of the camera into shadows, which will convey thoughts, bring dreams, to others all over the earth.

Power of Thoughts . . .

WHILE they are "behind the scenes," however, they are only human being are only human beings, vivid and interesting, but subject to the same limitations of time and space as you or I, to all the cares and annoyances that flesh is heir to. Frances Dee, in billowing black crinoline, picks her way obscurely among the boards, cables, and props on the rear side of the set, stumbles slightly over a support, frowns, regains her balance, and gropes her way onward before reaching the door through which she goes to become a creature removed, a part of the fancies of multitudes. Joel McCrea, awaiting his cue to enter the dream world, sits on an old barrel, and is seen to expectorate vigorously into the maze of the back stage realm, an amusing gesture, since it is one he will never execute on the screen. They are real people in a real world. But this observation is advanced not for any purpose of disillusionment. In the birth of any thought it is not the physical circumstances giving birth to it that is important, but the magnitude of the thought itself. Thoughts, unseen, intangible, are mighty. They have come from dingy garrets and the musty confines of prisons to reverberate for centuries in the minds and hearts of men. And such power it is pos-

sible for these thoughts, coming from the merely human persons and their earthy surroundings on a motion picture set, to exert. Principally because we see so much of its physical side, the production aspect, that is, we in Hollywood tend to look upon the motion picture industry as a local activity. Though we speak glibly now and then of its widespread distribution, we do not fully grasp its mammoth power to disseminate thought into the world. If we did, maybe we would send forth more fine thoughts. Maybe.

DR. MORKOVIN CONFIDES . . .

PPARENTLY even the most profound ponderers A of the cinema's technical and esthetic problems have their weary moments, when their thoughts would gladly turn to a lighter vein. What the cinematic intellectual prefers by way of mental diversion at such times, was so neatly phrased for me this summer by Dr. Boris V. Morkovin of the University of Southern California Cinematography Department, that I still grin when I think of it. Through his auspices I was to address a group of teachers and students on one of the closing days of the Cinema Appreciation Convention being held at the university, and prior to going before the others I asked him what phase of Hollywood activity he thought I could emphasize in my talk that would most interest the assemblage. The doctor ran his tongue whimsically along his upper lip and a twinkle came into his eye. He confided, "Intelligent gossip."

FROM LUGOSI FAN CLUB

TO the Editor:
As the western representative of the Lugosi Fan Club, I should like to express the club's appreciation of your article about mystery pictures in the Holly-wood Spectator of September 25, and more especially of the latter part, which suggests our favorite for a role which sounds very interesting. In general, we fans are immature, inarticulate, and (alas!) impecunious; hence we find great difficulty in making our opinions felt. Thus we realize that your article, in providing a public reminder of Mr. Lugosi, has done us a great service which we could not possibly have done for ourselves, and for which we are very grateful. We ardently hope that your article may help to bring about some action by the powers-that-be, and, sensing from your tone, that you too may be something of an addict to our obsession, we make bold to beg your sympathy for and cooperation with our campaign for more and better Lugosi pictures.— Susan Elizabeth Moir.

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IT'S NOT THE NATURAL THING TO DO!

By Bruno David Ussher

NEWSPAPERS announce a studio will make Life of Caruso, also that Mario Chamlee has been signed for the title role "because he resembles a little the great Italian tenor." This is a typical statement. Chamlee is reported signed because—I presume his forehead—looks a little like that of his predecessor at the Metropolitan Opera. That Chamlee sings excellently and is a fine actor are not mentioned. Not a word is said that this Los Angeles-born tenor was one of the first Americans to score a sustained success in Germany in German opera. At this writing the Life of Caruso has not yet been inscribed on any production schedule. So far it is a case of a great event casting its shadow of publicity ahead. By the way, will the monkey-house incident be included in the "life"? Which reminds me that Pierre V. R. Key and Bruno Zirato have written a voluminous tome on the immortal Enrico. Postscript, a few days later: Chamlee is again mentioned for the title role. The story is still for sale. A second and third studio are "interested" and a fourth one may do it.

And Also Victor Herbert . . .

WHAT has happened to Paramount's Life of Herbert plans? Gilbert Gabriel, the New York critic, who knew Mr. Naughty Marietta, did a fat script for Paramount. Expurgated actuality does not often make a good story. Life is fancier than fiction. So Mr. Gabriel has gone back to his Manhattan reviews. Paul Lannin, staff-conductor-composer during the heyday of Herbertian popularity, was to have collaborated with Gabriel. Lannin has gone, too, probably to his Florida retreat. Apropos of Chamlee, it would seem to me that some studio should buy the rights to Henri Rabaud's opera comique, Marouf or The Cobbler of Cairo in which Chamlee is riotously amusing. The story is based on incidents from the Arabian Night's Tales, but lends itself to a convincing combination of extravagance and realism. Done in color, with a hundred per cent music background, it would prove a wise undertaking for a wisely courageous producer. The Cobbler of Cairo and all the rest of the personages are already so funny that slapstick does not have to be laid on at all. The score might need a little cutting, but the book is excellent and the music is melodious, rhythmic and always carries either a note of caress or of laughter. Chamlee was starred in the title role during the Chicago summer opera of 1930 and made such a hit, that, I am happy to recall, Director-General Merola of the San Francisco-Los Angeles civic opera association, produced the work here at my suggestion. It is possible that costumes and designs are still in existence.

Swarthout and Moore...

UOTING the first paragraph of a publicity release: "For scenes in The Yellow Nightingale, Gladys Swarthout will use the bed on which Pola Negri lolled when she made Deception with Emil

Jannings several years ago." What will Swarthout sing in this film of the rise and triumph of a vocal star? I do not know how specific Columbia Pictures has been in regard to dramatically momentous furniture, but stress is being laid on the arias and songs which Grace Moore sings in I'll Take Romance. This newest of her productions will not be previewed in time for this article. It may be not amiss to mention, therefore, her vocal repertoire, which will be longer by two arias in the European releases of this picture. Miss Moore will be heard in Massenet's Gavotte from Manon, Drinking Song from Traviata with Frank Forrest and chorus; the finale from the first act of Martha, an Italian folk-tune, La Franchesi, the Jewel Song from Faust, an aria from Giordano's Andrea Chenier, while for good measure she has included also the hillbillie tune, I'll Be Comin' 'Round the Mountain, and, of course, the theme-song after which the picture is named. This ballad is composed by Ben Oakland to lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein. American audiences, however, will not hear the Chenier aria, and possibly not the Faust selection either. The former may be cut for reasons of length. As for the Jewel Song, is this florid music Miss Moore's best metier?

Early Grace Moore Picture . . .

REVIVALS being the vogue, I attended the Columbia-Moore One Night of Love. In the light of what has followed in its wake, this first Moore operafilm (if one may call it such) impressed me more than when it was a novelty. Except for some passing hokum, the story convincingly provides opportunities for this vocal star. These episodes are handled consistently. Professional realism is observed in details. And has Miss Moore ever sung better and more fervently? The entire production is charged with a glamor and musical vitality all too few pictures radiate. The opera sequences, from Carmen and Butterfly, Pietro Cimini conducting and seen on the screen, stirred me, especially the latter. There is music-dramatic veracity of emotion. I am wondering whether Miss Moore and Columbia generally, have really been given quite the credit they deserve, in view of what others have dared to do since this first Moore film.

Columbia's Hollywood Recording . . .

ONE is so apt to be swept off one's feet by the tonal onslaught of the Stokowski orchestra in 100 Men and a Girl, but, dear reader, listen again to the main episodes and especially to the quite extensive operatic sequences in this first Moore picture. Stokowski went East for his best recordings; Columbia's Harry Cohn hired the best men he could find and made superb recordings here! Or was it Victor Schertzinger, who directed the picture? Incidentally, in One Night of Love, it is Andreas de Segurola who finds a way of interesting a great vocal teacher in the poor American songbird. Quite recently, he himself took Deanna

Durbin under his wings as a coach. Motion pictures will improve if everyone is given credit for what he composes, arranges or orchestrates. A laborer is not only worth his hire, but also worth his recognition. Too often a department head, or a "famed" composer is accredited with the ingenuity and skill of others. It is the custom, but contrary to the charming Bing Crosby tune in Double or Nothing: It's not the natural thing to do.

LITTLE THOUGHTS ABOUT BIG PEOPLE

AND VICE VERSA By C. F. G.

THAT bit of Black on the Supreme Court must be mourning for the late N.R.A. Court mourning used to be for the period of one year. Modern practice is shorter. We hope.... It would seem that Mr. Roosevelt is over sanguine about the restoration of the blue buzzard. It will take more than the available supply of Black magic to revive that bird.... And we might as well get ready for those cartoon variations on the theme of eight black robes and a hooded white one which is Black.... Black, according to Webster: "Destitue of light, or incapable of reflecting it.... Enveloped or shrouded in darkness. Stained or soiled with dirt; unclean; foul. Quite devoid of moral light or goodness. Marked as hostile or unenlightened."

Jon Hall is the grandson of Lovina, the very real Tahitian inn-keeper portrayed in White Shadows of the South Seas.

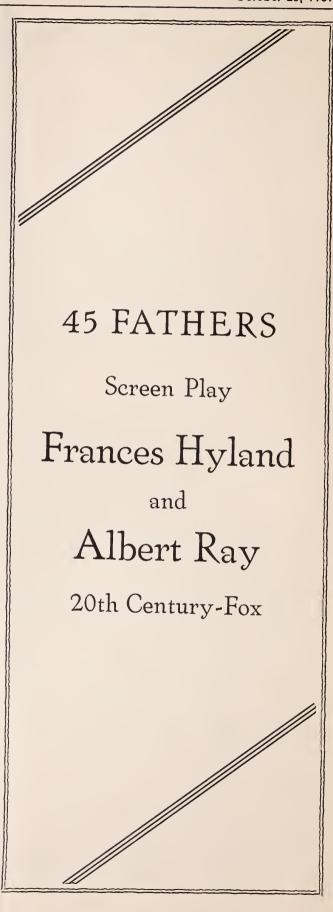
The Japanese are now offering photographic evidence of their asserted benign attitude toward the Chinese people. They are using propt-up bodies of Chinese civilians for bayonet practice.

Jimmy McLarnin, after fifteen years in the ring without injury, was confined to his bed three weeks when a hefty stooge he hit on the chin during the filming of a scene, fell on McLarnin's leg, almost unhinging his knee.

Now that telegraph companies are using punctuation it might be a good idea for everybody, including columnists.

With its loud-speaker equipped cars, the Los Angeles Police Department has taken another leaf out of the picture book. According to Feg Murray, Jonathan Hale's car has been equipped this way for some time. We hope the police are as polite as Hale, who says, "May I pass, please?" and "thank you."

An Associated Press despatch from Chicago says: "A call for a positive and courageous draft of policies by a committee of distinguished Republicans . . . came from Herbert Hoover today." So its going to be a draft of policies this time. To the best of this department's recollection the last one was more in the nature of a draft of wind, and only productive, in so far as the party was concerned, of a bad case of wry neck.



ADVERTISEMENT

EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPTS

WHATEVER Bob Sisk's opinion of my picture judgment may be, I do not know, but there is one thing he gives me credit for. "For a long time now I've been reading your recommendation of the Santa Maria Inn," he writes me. "Recently my wife and I tried it and this note is simply to say that I now regard you as a reliable hotel guide. It is a charming place at which one should arrive, not late at night, but early enough in the afternoon to enjoy its atmosphere. And that's what we're going to do the next time we go there."

From one Scotchman to Another . . .

1 NE of the country's leading educators, whose name, as Scotch as my own, I cannot reveal, as it was signed to a personal note to me, sizes up the Spectator in an interesting way: "I have gone over the last number with a dour and critical eye. It is a typical Scotch publication, fearless, realistic, critical, humored, and occasionally bull-headed and occasionally idealistic. That, to me, sums you and me up, I suspect, about as we find ourselves." And from a Washington, D. C., subscriber who has much to do with the formation of public opinion, comes this: "I do not know how I could get along without the Spectator. The September 25th issue is swell, and I enjoyed very much your answer to Quigley.

spectator. The September 25th issue is swell, and I enjoyed very much your answer to Quigley."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, of Hollywood Spectator, published weekly at Los Angeles, California, for October 1, 1937, State of California, County of Los Angeles, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesald, personally appeared Howard Hill, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Hollywood Spectator, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesald publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Hollywood Spectator, Inc., 6513 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California; Manging Editor, none; Business Manager, Howard Hill, 6513 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California; Manging Editor, none; Business Manager, Howard Hill, 6513 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California, Managing Editor, none; Business Manager, Howard Hill, 6513 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California, Developed the amount of stock. It not owned by a corporation the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a corporation, its name and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and addresses of the individual owners must be given. Hollywood Spectator, Inc., 6513 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California, Welford Beaton, 6513 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California, Welford Beaton, 6513 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles, California, Welford Beaton,

DID YOU SEE WHAT BEATON SAID ABOUT RO-MARI?

(Reprinted from the Spectator of August 14th)

ET us get away from pictures for a moment and for L the benefit of those who may be suffering from it, discuss Sciatica. For three months I had it and that means three months of pain. I wonder now how I refrained from snarling at every picture I reviewed, as going to previews was a painful experience. I tried the usual methods of treating the malady, but steadily grew worse. One day a friend bought me a bottle of RO-MARI. I never had heard of it, never had given a moment's consideration to any proprietary medicine, always having thought their advertisements were bunk. But because my friend told me Lionel Barrymore and Hugh Walpole had endorsed RO-MARI publicly, I agreed to try it. The druggist, my friend informed me, suggested two bottles. I followed the diet outlined by the RO-MARI people and faithfully took the medicine at the times prescribed, and the two bottles did their work. I feel many years younger. I never before wrote anything of this nature; I know no one connected with the RO-MARI concern, have no selfish interest to serve. But I have had Sciatica, know what it feels like, and feel I should let other sufferers know how I got rid of it. I believe RO-MARI also is beneficial in the treatment of Arthritis, Neuritis and kindred ailments.

THE importers of RO-MARI (it is compounded in Belfast, Ireland) modestly declaim that this enthusiastic essay by the conservative and dignified Mr. Beaton is really sump'in. Probably we should not have been surprised, because it is in line with similar reports that come flooding in from all sections of the United States and Great Britain. But we were surprised, and tremendously pleased, and we thank Mr. Beaton for his courtesy in allowing us to use his name in our advertising.

RO-MARI has become an international best-seller since it was first offered to sufferers in Great Britain some years ago. It is designed specifically to combat excess acid conditions so often an underlying cause associated with Arthritis, Sciatica, Neuritis, Lumbago, Gout and allied painful, crippling diseases. We do not even pretend that RO-MARI is a "cure-all," and we make no guarantee of what it will or won't do in any specific case, but we are proud that physicians on both sides of the Atlantic report definite improvement in between 75 and 90 per cent of cases observed under RO-MARI medication.

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Hollywood 10 CENTS SPECIATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Twelfth Year

Los Angeles, California—November 13, 1937

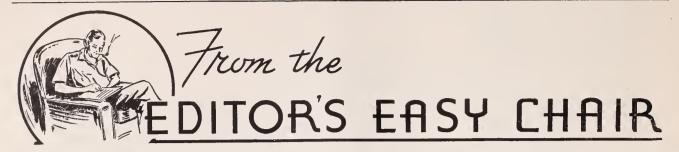
Vol. 12-No. 21

Radio Competition
Theatres' Problems
Executive Shortage
Laughs and Box-Office
Broadcasting Music
Class B Pictures
Exhibitor the Goat
Gene Autry's Appeal

... REVIEWS ...

HURRICANE ★ SECOND HONEYMOON ★ CHARLIE CHAN AT MONTE CARLO
MANHATTAN MERRY-GO-ROUND ★ BULLDOG DRUMMOND'S REVENGE
THRILL OF A LIFETIME ★ SWING IT, SAILOR ★ HIGH FLYERS

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MENACE OF RADIO COMPETITION . . .

REPORTS have it that some of the big advertising firms handling radio accounts are about to string together into two hours of air entertainment the programs of various clients, the idea being to hold listeners-in for that length of time without turning their dials, or-and this is where it becomes a matter of concern to the film industry—without turning their radios off after one program and spending the rest of the evening at a motion picture theatre. The strength of radio as an advertising medium depends upon the size of its audience, as that of a newspaper or magazine depends upon the extent of its circulation. It seems to me that radio sponsors are making a wise move, an obviously wise one, and one that it should not be hard to make successful. The only weakness radio has now as an entertainment medium which holds our attention over a considerable stretch of time, is the on-and-off quality of its consecutive series of programs. If a full two-hour program is arranged and divided into four half-hour periods, the four sponsors who join in its presentation will be assured larger audiences than they reasonably can expect under the present policy of scattered half-hour programs without entertainment relationship to hold the listener's continuous attention. A proposition so advantageous to those participating in it seems to be so reasonable that there should be no doubt of its ultimate accomplishment.

Both Offer the Same Thing . . .

NE can realize with what misgivings the motion picture industry regards this radio development so fraught with danger to film theatre box-offices. But it is the motion picture industry itself which has made it possible for such competition to make alarming inroads on its revenue. Of what does radio entertainment consist? Words and music. Of what has screen entertainment consisted since the film industry changed over from motion pictures to talkies? Words and music. Then why should we pay to be entertained by words and music in a film theatre when without cost we can be entertained by words and music in our homes? The only thing the screen gives us and radio does not, is what our imaginations can supply—the visual elements of the settings in which the radio stories are told. If in a radio sketch we hear a character say, "Quick! Grab that piece of

paper from the desk and drop it in the wastepaper basket." the words would mean nothing whatever to us unless our imaginations functioned to make us see what we would see on the screen if the scene were in a motion picture. Why, then, pay to see it in a theatre when we can get it for nothing in our homes? Music? As these words are being written, there is a radio, its dial within reaching distance from my chair, bringing me music from New York. When I want to hear music, why should I go somewhere and pay to hear it, when I can stay home, hear it for nothing, and go ahead with my work? All this makes it appear as if the film industry is in a desperate position, that when the radio plans are perfected there will be no more motion picture audiences. And what can the motion picture industry do to avoid such a fate?

Screen Has One Advantage . . .

THE motion picture can do one thing which no other medium of entertainment can do: it can photograph motion at a central point and to all parts of the world send films which will recreate the motion on theatre screens. Thus, at what would be a low cost if the business were conducted intelligently, it can give the world a form of entertainment which speaks the universal language of pictures, the only form which can make the pictures move. The appeal of a picture is elemental; each of us sees in it what his imagination can fashion. It reduces all of us to an intellectual level; we follow it with our eyes and interpret it with our imaginations. The person with the most highly developed intellect can imagine more than a person of inferior intellect, but each gets the one hundred per cent possible to him. Both radio and the stage have purely intellectual appeal; one must pay attention to what is said, digest it mentally, before his imagination can function to make it complete as entertainment. The screen, therefore, must be the world's greatest medium of entertainment, must appeal to the largest audience, and must be stronger than any competition which can be offered. It occupies a field into which competition can not enter.

Screen Helps Its Competitors . . .

BUT the screen has deserted its own field, has abandoned the form which gave it universal and elemental appeal and entered into competition with

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Hollywood Spectator

radio which gives the public without cost what the film industry must manufacture at great cost. It even goes so far as to lend its talent to its competitor, to permit its competitor to use its story material. Instead of selling its players' voices only to its own audience, it gives them without cost to the radio audience. More and more all the time it is becoming a medium merely for permitting the radio audience to see the people whose voices it is hearing. By telling its stories in dialogue the screen is lowering the importance of its visual elements. I will grant you that if the radio audience had to pay as much for what it hears as the screen audience has to pay for what it hears and sees, the competition of radio entertainment would not disturb the film industry greatly. For the same amount of money a person naturally would buy both sound and sight in preference to sound only; but the crux of the situation is that he gets the sound for nothing, and as both forms of entertainment deal principally in sound, there is little reason why the public should pay so much for the less essential element. Now that radio is determined to enter into direct competition with the screen, there is real danger that pictures will suffer an audience loss which will stagger the film industry.

There Is An Easy Way Out . . .

 $m{B}^{UT}$ if there were picture brains to function, the screen could turn up its nose at radio and go joyously on its way to greater glories and riches. It would do what radio can not do. It would give its audience more to look at and less to listen to; would go back to the form of entertainment which first captured the fancy of the world, and merely use the new element of sound as an adornment of minor importance. Unfortunately, however, the picture brains available lacks the power to function. Those who know what motion pictures are, work under people who lack such knowledge. Why even a picture producer can not realize the public would rather look at a thing than listen to it, is one of the many bewildering things about this funny picture business of ours. Radio can draw the audience away from the kind of entertainment Hollywood is providing now, but the kind of entertainment Hollywood should provide could hold its present audience and enlarge it by making inroads on the radio audience. Before it can be made, those who control its making must know what it is and why it is desirable, knowledge not possessed by any of our present production heads. Ever since pictures went over wholly to sound, Hollywood has been drifting towards an impasse, towards a crisis, and today apparently, is within hailing distance of it.

Nothing Succeeds Like Failure . . .

PICTURES really are in a situation which threatens to become most serious. True, nothing has happened or will happen which could not have been foreseen. By predicting, long in advance, everything which has happened so far, the Spectator was put down as an alarmist, a common scold who was mad at the film industry in general and cared little what

it said about it. Anyone who thought in terms of the true motion picture could reach no conclusions other than those reached by the Spectator and published in it. Some of the producing organizations are in a bad way now, and the whole industry is wondering where its future supply of top executives is to come from. Sam Briskin is dissatisfied with his RKO job and blames the company's poor showing, while he directed its operations, on the lack of support he was given; Bill LeBaron was reported dissatisfied because he feels he will be credited with the indifferent showing of Paramount. Under Charlie Rogers Universal is drifting rapidly towards bankruptcy. Nat Levine brought Republic to its knees and when he lost his job there, Metro snapped him up. Other studios will compete for Sam Briskin's services, and Charlie Rogers undoubtedly will head some other organization if he quits Universal or it quits him. And each shift of each of them will bring him an increase in salary, which justifies the four words at the head of this paragraph.

No Cats

Where Motion Is Needed . . .

NO AMOUNT of executive shifting will remedy the situation. Less motion in executive offices and more motion on the screen is the remedy needed. The studios need people who know what motion pictures are and will allow people under them to make them. Those whom I mention above did not fail because they made poor pictures. They failed because they made the wrong kind of pictures. They will fail again, and Zanuck and Wallis and the rest of them will fail, not because they do not know how to make the kind of pictures they are making now, but because they do not know the kind of pictures they should make. If when Sam Briskin first took over the RKO job, he had been equipped with real picture knowledge, if he had known exactly what it is that the film industry has for sale, and had supplied his company's customers with it, he today would be the biggest man in Hollywood, and all the others would be imitating him. There are plenty of executives with ability to get things done. The trouble is that there are so few who know what should be done. If by any possibility they can get it into their heads that they should make motion pictures, they can make them, and the dark cloud hovering over Hollywood will drift away. Very few people who stick strictly to their own businesses ever have business worries.

PRODUCERS GIVE THEIR VIEWS . . .

EDWIN SCHALLERT in a recent Los Angeles Times quoted various picture producers in defence of class B productions. Accepting producers as authorities on the subject, we find that cheap pictures are necessary to the industry. One producer claims they are necessary as a basis of comparison; another claims they serve a useful purpose in enabling exhibitors to show double bills. No exhibitor is objecting to B pictures as such. His complaint is that most of them do not please his audiences. To that

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Hollywood can reply that he pays only five dollars in some instances for a class B production. Far be it from me to pose as one qualified to argue convincingly with such an august personage as a motion picture producer, but will one of them tell me how it becomes good business for an exhibitor to pay even as little as five dollars for a picture that will drive customers away from his house? I realize producers can quote an authority to support their view. In David Harum they will find this bit of wisdom, which applies equally to exhibitors and audiences: "A few fleas is good for a dog; kinder keeps him from wor-ryin' about being a dog." And there is something in the underworld which might apply: "Never give a sucker a break." The exhibitor is the sucker. By the film industry's method of selling its pictures, he must take the bad with the good, and as the B pictures are sold before they are made, producers have become more interested in their cost and the speed with which they can be turned out than they are in the degree of entertainment quality they attain.

Exhibitors Are the Goats . . .

NO ONE can object to classification of pictures as A's and B's when the classification is based solely on cost. What concerns exhibitors and audiences is the poor quality of the B's. With so many A pictures becoming bad by accident, there is no reason why producers should turn out more by design and offer as an excuse that they are merely B's. Today the product as a whole is causing exhibitors concern, and if we trace the trouble back to its source, we find it lies in the producers' habit of thinking in terms of money instead of entertainment values. Each producer is trying to out-spend the other. When Room Service, the New York stage play, went on the market for screen material, producing organizations began to bid for it more for the fun of the thing than on the basis of what it was worth, and RKO won the game, the other players throwing down their hands when Radio raised the bet to \$225,000 of its stockholders' money. Of course, the play as screen material is worth perhaps only \$5,000, but it was good fun. When the picture is offered exhibitors, the big price asked for it will be based on the cost of the story, not upon its merits. The exhibitor in Deadwood, South Dakota, will be asked to pay a large sum for the picture because some people in New York and a few other cities saw the play. The quarter-million dollars wasted on the story will come back to the company in two ways: It will be assessed against exhibitors, and the budgets of a flock of RKO class B pictures will be trimmed a little finer. But it is not small production budgets from which class B pictures are suffering now; it is small production brains. I have not yet seen a class B picture which would not have attained class A entertainment rating if all its potentialities had been realized.

TWO MINDS AND ONE THOUGHT . . .

FROM an interview with Leo McCarey in Variety (New York), October 27: "The day will come, he optimistically insists, when you can cast Emma

Lilch and Hank Tennenessi in the leads and be successful, if you've made a good picture." From the Spectator, October 30: "Given the same script (The Awful Truth), the same director, the same production and supporting cast, Sophie Glutz and Joe Doakes could have played the leading parts and the picture in the long run would have done about the same business it is doing now."

GARBO, LOUELLA AND HEDY . . .

METRO, we are told, is to apply the Garbo system of publicity to Hedy La Mar, one of its recent foreign importations. To date, as nearly as I can judge by what I read in the papers, the only thing the system has to its credit is the scorn of Louella Parsons. Louella, who, with an equally scornful regard for the dictates of ordinary modesty, permits herself to be introduced on the air each week as the "first lady of Hollywood," apparently has a tough time sustaining her dignity as such in face of Metro's blunt refusal to permit one of her staff to interview Hedy and give her some nice publicity. To put the Metro publicity department in its place, Louella expresses herself on an Examiner front page and gives Hedy far more publicity than the department would have been instrumental in securing if it had permitted the Parsons representative to see the illusive foreigner. So, as it appears to such an innocent bystander as myself, the problem of getting a lot of publicity for Hedy-at least, in the Hearst papers-is one of trying to keep Louella from getting within hailing distance of the young person. However, I understand Hedy is a gregarious girl, a good mixer, one who likes to lead a normal life. If so, Metro may as well surrender to Louella now. The Garbo treatment can not be a success when applied synthetically. It was successful with Garbo in spite of the publicity department, not because of it. It is a matter of history that Metro publicists declared to high heaven that Garbo would not get anywhere as a screen favorite because she refused to talk to newspapermen. And she became the most publicized person in pictures.

OUTLOOK IS NOT BRIGHT . . .

ON the whole, this picture business is a funny one. It employs an Irving Berlin or a Jerome Kern to write a song for one of its pictures. Before the picture is released, it hands the song to radio stations and it goes on the air. When the picture has its first showings in the big cities, the song is still new enough to have some entertainment value. By the time the picture reaches its main market, smaller cities, towns, villages, the song is so worn out that radio orchestras no longer play it because the public no longer wants to hear it even for nothing. But the poor exhibitor has to ask his customers to pay to hear it in his house. When the customers come out, they make a kick to the exhibitor and the exhibitor writes to the Spectator and asks if something can not be done about it, and the Spectator writes back no, not until the film in-

dustry becomes wholly sane and that there is no indication as yet that the process of developement of complete sanity even has begun. When, if ever, it becomes sane, it will not permit one bar of music or one line of lyric in any one of its songs to be heard anywhere except in the picture in which it belongs. But the outlook is not promising for the exhibitor. An industry crazy enough to permit the radio broadcast of a condensed version of a new picture, is too crazy to develope sanity except by a long and slow progress.

WE DISCOVER MR. GENE AUTRY . . .

WHEN I read again the proud boost of Republic that Gene Autry gets more fan mail than anyone else in pictures, and had added to it the numerous other things I had heard about this singing cowboy, I considered it high time that I rounded him up and found out what makes him click. I never had seen him either on or off the screen, which meant unjustified editorial neglect on the part of the Spectator, in whose columns the name of the screen's chief mailgetter certainly belonged. So I asked Republic to let me see one of his pictures and it showed me Boots and Saddles, his latest. Now I am a Gene Autry fan. I could see what makes him click. He has personality, masculine charm; is of the rugged, outdoor type; gentle, though he-mannish; has the suggestion of laziness which makes athletic vigor attractive, and the grace of movement characteristic of those who live near nature. Autry is part of the Western plains, part of the outdoors, a human animal whose habitat is where few humans are. Honesty, sincerity, patience, loyalty, forebearance are revealed in his voice and actions as the qualities, more than just his features, which make him a manly handsome man. He does not ride his horse; he becomes part of it the moment he throws a leg over the saddle. And he has exactly the kind of singing voice we would expect to hear when he begins to sing, a manly voice with a drawl in it and understanding back of it.

Republic's Great Opportunity . . .

DEPUBLIC is not doing right by its Gene, if I $oldsymbol{\Lambda}$ may judge all his pictures by the one I saw. Nor is it doing right by its exchequer in aiming him only at the market already established. Without the sacrifice of even one among the many millions of fans he has now, it could add to them many more millions who live in the big cities in which Autry pictures are not shown. He is one star who has everything which appeals to every kind of audience. As a matter of fact, Westerns belong inherently more to Broadway than to Main Street. The small town people have outdoors of their own; New York people have none, yet all the standard Westerns take their outdoors only to the small town people. Boots and Saddles is too small a picture for a star so big. It gets its entertainment value from Autry's personality and its vigorous action, but it is not a picture for the biggest theatres. A little more care, and a little more

time in making it would have qualified it for a Broadway run. Of course, one silly thing in it would have to be eliminated if Republic ever hopes to widen the scope of the Autry market, to get intelligent picture patrons to accept him seriously as a leading star. It is the practice of offering him as Gene Autry playing Gene Autry. Calling a screen character by the name of the actor playing it is so absurdly childish, so contrary to every law of screen art, so foreign to the very essence of screen entertainment, that I wondered, when I viewed Boots and Saddles, if Autry ever would get far in a studio which thought the practice a wise one.

WHAT PRICE LAUGHTER? . . .

AMONG scripts I have read recently was one given me by an associate producer in one of the major studios. In talking it over with him after I read it, I told him he should eliminate one scene as it would disturb the harmony of the picture. He thought I was wrong, and decided to shoot the scene and see how it looked in the completed picture. I dismissed the matter from my mind, did not think of it again until my producer friend called me up one morning last week. "You were wrong about cutting out that scene," he told me. "We had a sneak preview last night; went over big, and the scene you wanted us to throw overboard got the biggest laugh. You see, I was right." I told him I had advised the elimination of the scene for the very reason he gave for retaining it-because I knew it would get a laugh, that I had laughed when I read it, and the laugh had come in the wrong place. "Laughs are what put pictures over," he contended. "There is no wrong place for a laugh." I have not seen the picture yet, but in the script the story was a moderately serious social drama, with a few legitimately amusing spots.

If They Belong, Is What Counts . . .

MANY pictures pay a big price for the laughter they provoke. Audience response to a given scene is not the gauge by which its right to be in a picture can be judged. What matters is its relationship to the picture as a whole. In the script I read, the drama had been developed consistently enough to establish the picture's mood, had become serious in what, let us call, situation A. It was followed abruptly by situation B, the one I questioned because it made me laugh when I read it; but I could not see what it had to do with anything which had preceded it. Situation C, again abruptly, took up the drama where A had left it, and the mood which A had developed had to be developed again, and in the rest of the script there was nothing in any way connected with the comedy in B. I wrote in a recent Spectator that a picture's mood is what gives it continuity of audience interest. A serious picture's strength as entertainment is not established by the laughter it causes. What counts is the consistency with which it holds the interest of the audience in the narrative as a whole. "But it got a laugh," is the weakest argument which can be advanced in defence of a scene's right to a place in a picture. The only measure by which it can be judged is the degree in which it sustains the mood of the production. A common studio practice is to "clock" the laughs at a preview and to judge a picture's merits by the total number. That is all right in the case of a comedy, but is all wrong in the case of a serious drama. In the latter case the matter of importance is whether the laugh provoking scenes are legitimate parts of the picture as a whole.

PUBLICIST IN THE MAKING . . .

BOBBY, our eight-year-old grandson, apparently is destined to become a noted film press agent. Overheard him telling a playmate that he could fly over cities with a fish pole, line and hook, and snatch waffles out of windows of houses and eat them while in flight. A mind like that should go far.

LITTLE PICTURE CAN LEAD THEM . . .

WHEN Charlie Chan at Monte Carlo (reviewed on page ten) is shown hereabouts, it would be worth a visit by those who write and who direct motion pictures, as well as those who produce them and all others who think dialogue is the most important element in screen entertainment. Like all other pictures made in Hollywood, the Chan series is aimed chiefly at English-speaking audiences. The Spectator for years has been protesting that a lot of the dialogue we are forced to listen to is unnecessary to our understanding of the stories told on the screen, that its contributions to the stories could be expressed by action and facial expression to the greater satisfaction of the audience. Hollywood persists upon adhering to the opposite conviction, that the screen has become a medium of expression in dialogue, that audiences prefer to have the stories told to them in words. This last of the Chan pictures proves the Spectator's argument even though it talks its way through every reel. It so happens that much of the dialogue is in the French language, which its producers know will not be understood by American audiences. Assuming you do not understand French and that you view the picture, you will not be able to follow a great deal of the talking. But at no place in the picture will you be in doubt about the meaning of the scenes or what story points are being put over in the foreign language. In other words. the scenes would have lost none of their story value if you had heard none of the talking, if they had been shot in silence. But if the contention of the producers has merit, if you must hear and understand every word uttered on the screen, Charlie Chan at Monte Carlo would be a total loss to you. But instead of its being a total loss, it will prove to be an entertaining little picture without any obscure spots.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS...

STARTED my writing this morning at two minutes after eight. . . One of my favorite songs which was radioed into temporary oblivion but

which will go on forever: Good Night, Sweetheart. ... When I hear a certain sound on the rear porch, I go out and pick Petruska, the kitten, off the screen; climbing up it is her way of notifying us that she wants to come in. . . . In a Hollywood shop, October 29; Gail Patrick buying cards for Christmas presents; I am purchasing one office supply; "There!" she says to me, "I've finished my Christmas shopping." And I never finish mine before Christmas Eve. . . . This seems to be vacuum cleaning day in my library; I'd better light my pipe and loiter for a spell in the garden; of course I could claim my writing comes first, but I never yet have been able to get away with it. . . . Last winter, during the record cold spell, I bought four suits of neck-to-ankles underwear like Grandpa wore; come on, Winter, strut your stuff! . . . Here and there in the garden green shoots are coming up, all promises of an abundant narcissus crop even before the real advent of spring—a perfumed crop of delicate beauty, advance guard of summer bloom. . . . Now that Yale tied the score with Dartmouth in the last fifteen seconds of play, will you kindly refrain from further wisecracks about the hero-and-the-last-minute habit the screen has? . . . Mrs. Spectator is happy; found something else needing painting; tall, narrow, vegetable cooler with a tier of small, slatted shelves; taking such pains with it, one would think we were going to entertain in it. . . . A newspaper item: "Thirteen dollars a ton is granted sardine fishers." I didn't know there was a ton of sardines. . . . Drew up to the curb; instead of turning off the car radio, by mistake I turned it full on; at the top of its voice it screamed, "Hello, Sweetie Pie!" just as an austere, dignified, aloof woman was passing; she stopped as if shot, looked frigidly at me, but I decided to leave there and park somewhere else. . . . London Era tells me that an exhibitor broke his foot when he kicked a distributor in the heart. . . . In spite of Martha Raye's screaming on the screen and on the air, I still insist she's got something both mediums can use. . . . Writes O. O. McIntyre, "For the past few years New York has been showing a growing cheese consciousness." Which explains why some motion pictures do big business there. . . . Hollywood Theatre marquee: 100 Men and a Girl, She's No Lady; on behalf of my sweet little friend, Deanna Durbin, I resent that slam. . . . In putting out the food for the birds just now, I discovered the Graham crackers I gave them are of the Sunshine brand, that they have in them brown sugar, fresh whole milk and pure honey, and that before serving the crispness may be improved by placing them on a pie pan and slightly warming them in oven; however, the birds seem satisfied with them without all that fussing. . . . It is late now; the house is quiet, the grate fire about done; the spaniel and the Pekinese have come for me; the last thing at night I find something in the refrigerator which Mrs. Spectator has fixed for me; beside it always is a plate of odds and ends which I toss to Freddie and Bo Peep as I have my midnight snack. Will you excuse us?

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

IS VERY BIG, BUT NOT GREAT . . .

• THE HURRICANE; Samuel Goldwyn production for United Artists; directed by John Ford; associate producer, Merritt Hulburd; from the novel by Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall; screen play by Dudley Nichols; adaptation by Oliver H. P. Garrett; art director, Richard Day; assisted by Alex Golitzen; musical direction, Alfred Newman; cinematographer, Bert Glennon; costumes, Omar Kiam; film editor, Lloyd Nosler; sound recorder, Jack Noyes; special effects and hurricane staged by James Basevi; assisted by R. T. Layton; special effects photography, R. O. Binger; associate director. Stuart Heisler; South Seas photography, Archie Stout and Paul Eagler; assistant director, Wingate Smith; set decorator, Julia Heron. Cast: Dorothy Lamour, Jon Hall, Mary Astor, C. Aubrey Smith, Thomas Mitchell, Raymond Massey, John Carradine, Jerome Cowan, Al Kikume, Kuulei De Clercq, Layne Tom, Jr., Mamo Clark, Movita Castenada, Reri, Francis Kaai, Pauline Steele, Flora Hayes, Mary Shaw, Spencer Charters,

REAT pictorially, but not a great motion picture. G Its story, which should wring your heart, will leave you cold. You will admire the way the story is told, glory in the beauty of much exquisite scenery, and be thrilled as you never before have been thrilled, by the hurricane which blows across the screen. A picture's merits, however, can not be judged by our visual sense. What counts is the extent our feelings have been stirred by what we see. The Hurricane story—ably put into screen play form by Dudley Nichols form Oliver Garrett's adaptation of the book—has everything to arouse our deepest sympathy for the boy and girl about whom it is written; it should make us weep as we wept at the first Seventh Heaven, as we wept with Barbara Stanwyck in Stella Dallas; it should bring lumps to our throats as acting bits in scores of pictures on a season's program bring them by making us participate in what we see on the screen. We do not participate in Hurricane. We sit back and look at it. We admire it as we admire a beautiful woman we do not know and do not care greatly to meet. When the terrific hurricane shakes the theatre, it has little human appeal to us. We wonder how Sam Goldwyn's crew of technicians ever managed to create it. Briefly put, we are conscious all the time that we are looking at a motion picture. No one ever was made to cry by a motion picture. He cried because he imagined he was looking at real life, not at a motion picture.

It Lacks Emotional Appeal . . .

REGARDED objectively, Hurricane is a magnificently conceived and achieved screen offering. Brilliantly written, brilliantly directed, and technically a masterpiece, it fails to rate highly as a human document because the boy and girl whose tragedy motivated it, lack the inner power to make us feel for them as we should feel. Physically, Jon Hall is ideal for the part; spiritually he is unequal to it. Dorothy Lamour is a pretty little thing, but she does not reach our emotions. The two were unyielding clay in the hands of even as great a moulder of emotions as John Ford. The more experienced

members of the cast give excellent performances, but their parts are not designed to make bids for our sympathy. The story is one of the difference between the Polynesian and Occidental conceptions of justice. The two young people typify the Polynesian conception, Raymond Massey the other. The theme is given abstract development, is brought out in discussions, in what may be termed debates between Thomas Mitchell, superbly human as the champion of the South Sea Islanders, and Massey, as the representative of Occidental law and order. Neither side wins. A third party, the hurricane, brings the debate to an abrupt end without ending the controversy, without determining which viewpoint is the more justified. It is as if a total stranger entered a home in which a man and wife were quarreling, and terminated the controversy by beating up both of them. That would settle the fight, but not the controversy.

We Have a Cockeyed View . . .

DESPITE its weaknesses, Hurricane still is a picture you should see It will ture you should see. It will awaken you anew to the apparently limitless possibilities of screen technique. The hurricane is the most amazing thing ever shown in a picture house, makes the earthquake in San Francisco seem like a paltry antic of a playful nature. You see a tropical island and its population blown way, roofs ripped off houses, sea overwhelm land, trees uprooted and tossed around like feathers. Hollywood at last has overtaken the adjective, "stupendous." My personal opinion is that there is too much of it; you may wish for still more of it. In this review I am endeavoring to convey to you an impression of what you will see, not describing my view of it. My seat at the preview was so far up front and to one side that my view was rather cockeyed. To me, the people on the screen were eight feet tall and their faces had the shape of elongated eggs. My view of it made me weary of the picture before it had run half its course, but I do not think it affected my judgment of the weaknesses I have enumerated, even though I am sore at Jock Lawrence for assigning me to such rotten seats.

What Not to Do With Music . . .

TO Merritt Hulburd, the Goldwyn associate producer, goes boundless credit for a magnificently done job in coordinating so successfully the various elements entering into such an ambitious presentation. The assignment of James Basevi to the task of creating the hurricane gave him an opportunity to be the real hero of the production. Another technician whose work entitles him to recognition, is Lloyd Nosler, film editor. He faced a big task and accomplished it brilliantly, presenting us with one of the finest demonstrations of cutting the screen has shown in a long time. Four camera artists contributed to the feast of superlative photography, Bert Glennon, R. O. Binger, Archie Stout and Paul Eagler. Music plays a big part in the production, but not always a wise part. In a picture which creates so much noise, the music should have been a soft background to its

entire length. In some Hurricane spots there is no music; in other spots it steps to the front, gains such volume that it buries the story. Thus far in its picture development, Hollywood has failed to grasp intelligently an understanding of the place of music in screen entertainment. When it does, it will make its entertainment much more entertaining. Hurricane is a good example of what not to do with music. And, by way of ending this review, I would remark that, with the exception of his choice of seats for me, Jock Lawrence, Sam's accomplished publicity department head, gave us the most expertly managed Carthay Circle premiere I have attended in a decade of attending them. I hope Jock sometime will find himself in the same seats, and get cockeyed.

SPARKLING ENTERTAINMENT . . .

• SECOND HONEYMOON; Twentieth Century-Fox; directed by Walter Lang; associate producer, Raymond Griffith; screen play by Kathryn Scola and Darrell Ware; based on the Red Book magazine story by Philip Wylie; photography, Ernest Palmer, A.S.C.; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and David Hall; set decorations by Thomas Little; assistant director, Gene Bryant; film editor, Walter Thompson; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; sound, Eugene Grossman and Roger Heman; musical direction, David Buttolph. Cast: Tyrone Power, Loretta Young, Stuart Erwin, Claire Trevor, Marjorie Weaver, Lyle Talbot, J. Edward Bromberg, Paul Hurst, Jayne Regan, Hal K. Dawson, Mary Treen.

AS is the case with nearly all screen stories, you have seen this one in a score of other pictures, but I do not think you have heard it told so delightfully, produced more smartly, cast so appropriately, directed more intelligently than you will find it in Century's Second Honeymoon. It is most engaging entertainment, with a series of flawless performances, clever lines and amusing situations. I imagine, though, that it may cause the lifting of some eyebrows too proper to allow a sense of humor to lurk behind them. Tyrone Power makes love to Loretta Young, who is Lyle Talbot's wife, and runs away with her before she is divorced from Lyle. True, she formerly was Tyrone's wife, which might be regarded as ameliorating circumstance but does not alter the ugly fact of Tyrone's making love to another man's wife. Being a tough old blade myself, one equipped with a readily adjustable sense of social values, the story of Second Honeymoon did not disturb me at all. I have no hesitation in recommending it to all the girls between high school and early grandmotherhood, and to the shock-proof ones beyond that.

Drunkenness and a Loud Quarrel ...

ONE sequence, though, I definitely disapprove. Tyrone Power has become popular with audiences because he typifies our conception of decent American young manhood, an alive young fellow with a sense of humor, an engaging personality and a streak of clean devilment to add just the proper touch of spice to his character. But we do not see him as one who drinks himself into a maudlin state. In the offending sequence he and Paul Hurst are presented as a

couple of drunks, apparently for the purpose of garnering laughs from those who regard drunkenness as amusing. The drunkenness is entirely void of story significance and is presented for its own sake and as an expedient for the introduction of Paul Hurst as the owner of a fishing boat which Power later hires. Hurst could have been introduced in any one of a hundred other ways more in keeping with the smart mood of the picture. I might make this a wholly disapproving paragraph by mentioning in it also the only example of poor direction in the entire picture. Loretta Young and Power stage a quarrel scene late at night and in front of cottages occupied by members of the fishing party. Their raised voices could be heard for a mile in all directions, but no one seems to hear them. It is an amusing quarrel, but would have been much more amusing and believable if it had been carried on in subdued, forceful tones. It is strange that so little intelligence should be displayed in the direction of this sequence when so much is displayed in every other sequence in the picture.

Story Value of Facial Expression . . .

O^{NE} outstanding feature of Walter Lang's direction is its recognition of the story value of a quizzical look, of raised eyebrows, of a fleeting smile. The fine points of Loretta's splendid performance are such fleeting contributions to it, subtle touches which did not escape the audience, as was evidenced by its instant reaction to them. Throughout the production its visual elements, the facial expressions of the players, its true cinematic values figure more largely in telling the story than is usual in this talkie era. And for that, great credit is due Lang. With the exception of the raised voices in the quarrel sequence, direction of the dialogue is expert and understanding, sustains the mood of scenes and makes the players seem the people they play. Kathryn Scola and Darrell Ware did some brilliant writing in turning out the screen play. Bernard Herzbrun and David Hall supplied some most attractive sets in which Thomas Little displayed rare artistic judgment in their dressing. Enhancing the pictorial value of the whole are the stunning gowns designed by Gwen Wakeling. All the physical features, however, would not have been such an asset to the picture if the photography had been placed in less capable hands than those of Ernest Palmer. His camera work is outstanding, particularly some night shots which are photographic masterpieces. Add to all this the music directed by David Buttolph, the intelligent sound recording by Eugene Grossman and Roger Heman, and the expert film editing of Walter Thompson, and the sum total is a completely creditable cinematic job.

Meet Miss Marjorie Weaver . . .

WHEN you see Second Honeymoon I think you will agree with me that Loretta Young's performance is the best, the most understanding, the most finely shaded, she has to her credit thus far. That is another tribute to Lang's direction, as are, in fact, all the rest of the performances. Power is

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excellent, Stu Erwin outstanding, Claire Trevor her usual charming and convincing self, while Edward Bromberg and Lyle Talbot are perfect in their widely differing characterizations. You may have read this in the last Spectator: "High on the list of Spectator convictions is that the screen is not an acting art, that it is an art of expression by personality." If you are in doubt of my meaning, see Second Honeymoon. I mean Marjorie Weaver. This young person blows into the picture like a breath of exhibarating atmosphere perfumed with the incense of the joy of living. The element of hazard in predicting a successful screen career for a newcomer is the treatment producers will accord her. Producers ruin more careers than they make. For instance, as proof that Century does not know what it has for sale in the person of Tyrone Power, I point to the drunken sequence I have mentioned. What it will do with Marjorie Weaver can not be predicted, but if it does not try to make an actress of her, if it does not run her from one picture to another in the belief she needs experience, in short, if it displays just common, horse sense in its treatment of her, it will have, in the person of the delectable Marjorie, the season's most sensational find.

HAS MUCH TO RECCOMEND IT . . .

● MANHATTAN MERRY-GO-ROUND; Republic; associate producer, Harry Sauber; director, Charles F. Riesner; original screen play, Harry Sauber; based on musical revue, "Manhattan Merry-Go-Round," by Frank Hummert; musical sequences supervised by Harry Grey; photographer, Jack Marta; film editor, Ernest Nims; musical director, Aberto Colombos original songs, Jack Lawrence, Peter Tinturin, Gene Autry, Jack Owen, Jerome Jerome, Richard Byron and Walter Kent; art director, John Victor Mackey; assistant director, George Sherman. Cast: Gene Autry, Phil Regan, Leo Carrillo, Ann Dvorak, Tamara Geva, James Gleason, Ted Lewis and his orchestra, Cab Calloway and his Cotton Club orchestra, Kay Thompson and her ensemble, Joe Di Maggio, Henry Armetta, Luis Alberni, Max Terhune, Smiley Burnette, Louis Prima and his band, Selmer Jackson, Eddie Kane, Moroni Olsen, Nellie V. Nichols, Gennaro Curci, Sam Finn, Al Herman, Robert E. Perry, Jack Adair, Jack Denny and his orchestra, the Lathrops, Rosalean and Seville, Thelma Wunder.

QUITE an entertaining picture. For one thing, Republic has not used the standard musical picture story which the other studios keep in stock, dust off each year and serve to the public again, its big scene being the hero's stage spectacle with which he slays Broadway after winning his way through to victory against simply dreadful odds. The Republic story has a more direct way of getting things done. Leo Carrillo, Italian this time, is in the loan racket as one branch of his general racketeering business. In the opening scene he explains that he charges "only thirty-five per cent, the legal rate of interest," and sometimes has to foreclose on his victims. In that way he becomes owner of a recording company which provided the world with phonograph records. It makes no difference to Leo if an artist he wants is under contract to another recording outfit. He maintains a loyal band of eager thugs under the command of Jim Gleason, and the artist Leo wants is brought in to do his or her stuff. It is all very amusing and comes within the degree of probability long since established as legitimate by stage musical comedies. The various acts follow one another in quick succession, and there is not a weak one among them. So, taken all together, Republic's Merry-Go-Round is a worthwhile piece of entertainment which will return full value for the price of admission.

Writing and Direction Intelligent . . .

HARRY SAUBER'S screen play is about as neat a display of screen writing as we have had this season. To weave the various specialty numbers into a smoothly running whole and keep the story in sight all the time, was no easy task, but Sauber proves himself equal to it. The story is a slim one, an amusing variation of the triangle theme, but it serves to knit the whole thing together logically and to set a fast pace, an achievement rarely accomplished in screen musical comedies. Credit for the smooth story-telling belongs to Chuck Riesner whose direction is excellent throughout. Long since established as a director with a sense of comedy values, Chuck gives us here what appears to me to be the best, most understanding job he has turned out. He is responsible for a series of outstanding, well balanced performances. Leo Carrillo never appeared to better advantage, never was more amusing. And I can remember no performance of Jim Gleason's that I liked better. A newcomer who reveals she has everything the screen needs is Tamara Geva. She possesses a glorious singing voice and rare comedy ability, is full of zest and romps through her part as if she were having the time of her life. She is a real find. Phil Regan's singing and acting are among the picture's assets. Ann Dvorak handles capably her part of the romance shared with Regan and in which Miss Geva is the exuberant disturbing factor. Henry Armetta has one of those explosive bits he does so well and various others handle minor roles capably.

Has Considerable Name Value . . .

MONG the notable names in the cast is Joe Di A Maggio, Yankee homerunner. He is as easy before the camera as a seasoned screen veteran, though we do not see him for more than a couple of minutes. Gene Autry, Ted Lewis, Cab Calloway, and Kay Thompson and her rhythm ensemble are others who make worthwhile contributions. Harry Sauber, author, became Harry Sauber, producer, when his authoring was completed, and is to be credited with having given the picture a completely satisfactory production. John Victor MacKay, art director, provided many excellent sets which are a credit to screen architecture in general and which Jack Marta photographed with artistic skill. Credit for the smooth visual continuity of the picture goes to Ernest Nims, film editor. Quite a number of people participated in the musical feast. Their names will be found in the credits at the head of this review. The general musical direction fell into the capable hands of Alberto Colombo, who performed his task in the masterly manner characteristic of all his screen work.

THAT CHAN'S HERE AGAIN . . .

● CHARLIE CHAN AT MONTE CARLO; Twentieth Century-Fox; directed by Eugene Forde; associate producer, John Stone; screen play by Charles Belden and Jerry Cady; original story by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; based on the character "Charlie Chan," created by Earl Derr Biggers; photography, Daniel B. Clark, A.S.C.; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Haldane Douglas; assistant director, Saul Wurtzel; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Herschel; sound, Bernard Freericks and Harry M. Leonard; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Warner Oland, Keye Luke, Virginia Field, Sidney Blackmer, Harold Huber, Kay Linaker, Robert Kent, Edward Raquello, George Lynn, Louis Mercier, George Davis, John Bleifer, Georges Renavent.

O^F THE sixteen screen appearances of Warner Oland as Charlie Chan, most of which I have seen, I believe I like his Charlie Chan At Monte Carlo most. Warner is the screen's only institution, the only player who has been the same person in so many pictures. And he is not wearing out his welcome; he can go on and on for as long as the studio can find stories that give him half a chance. It is Warner's acting ability that keeps the series going, and one of the interesting aspects of the series is that it has given him a corner on the Chan character. To millions of picture patrons Warner Oland is Charlie Chan and I doubt if a picture showing anyone else in the role would get anywhere at the box-office. His latest vehicle is interesting from the outset; following, of course, the usual formula, but not straining as hard as usual to include so many of Chan's philosophic utterances. The story is told against a Monte Carlo background which will not be as authentic to those who know Monte Carlo as it will be interesting to those who do not. Century has given it a satisfying production, Bernard Herzbrun and Haldane Douglas having some attractive settings to their credit as art directors. The camera work of Daniel Clark brings out all their pictorial values.

Collection of Good Performances . . .

PICTURE with a story which offers little that A is new, must rely upon its direction and performances to put it over. Eugene Forde's direction is spotty, but all the performances are excellent, although I would like to see a Chan picture in which Keye Luke does not strive so hard to score his points. Keye should be allowed to play himself, a quiet, likeable Chinaman of cheerful disposition and with a sense of humor. The strongest supporting performance I have seen in any picture in the series is that of Harold Huber in this one. In many previous appearances he has demonstrated what an accomplished actor he is, but never before have I seen him in a role in which his linguistic ability plays such a big part. His role is that of the commissioner of police of the Principality of Monaco, the language of which is French, and a great deal of his dialogue is delivered in that tongue. A feature of the picture is its generous dose of French, many of the characters speaking nothing else, but at no time is the audience left in doubt as to the meaning of the lines. For this, great credit is due the scenarists, Charles Belden and Jerry Cady, who put in screen form the interesting original

story by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan. Huber has the chief motivating role, one of various moods, and his performance is a truly admirable one. Sidney Blackmer performs with his usual intelligent grasp of his role. Another compelling performance is that of Edward Raquello, whom I never saw before. Virginia Field and Kay Linaker contribute the feminine element, both doing nicely. All the others contribute to the high acting quality of the production.

Box-Office Value of Accuracy . . .

IJOICE modulation, as the Spectator so often has urged, is what gives meaning to what is said. Forde's direction does not take this into account. Oland, as the detective called into the case, and Huber, the police officer who is handling it, are seated at a table in a hotel dining room in which other tables are occupied. In a matter-of-fact manner, in tones which can not prevent their being overheard, they discuss the case. There is no drama in a scene of that sort, none of the quality which makes crime pictures thrilling. Even if there were no chance of their being overheard, the two men should have conversed in low, confidential tones to impress upon the audience the dramatic significance of the scene. Another interesting point the picture suggests is the value of authenticity of the locale. Producer John Stone is not given a great deal of money to spend on a Chan picture, and may plead that as an excuse for failure to show us Monte Carlo as so many millions of people throughout the world know it to be; and on the same plea the director might excuse his indifference to the real routine of the famous casino. But among the many millions, there will be some who will see the picture and whose enjoyment of it will be lessened by its lack of authenticity. I can not see why it costs more to make a set look like the real thing than it does to make it look like something else. The point is worth discussion because it applies to all pictures presenting actual locales.

Von Stroheim Was Annoyed . . .

WHEN the story reaches the casino, we see a practically accurate duplicate of the main entrance as viewed from the Place Casino. Inside, however, there is nothing to remind one of the famous gambling establishment. Instead of the plain room on

JACK MARTA
Photographed
"MANHATTAN
MERRY - GO - ROUND"
For Republic

the left in which visitors display their passports and secure tickets of admission to the gaming rooms, we have an ornate glass booth on the right where tickets are poked through a little window to people who merely give their names and present no credentials. Right there the picture will lose the respect of all those who know their Monte Carlo, while all those who do not know it will get a false impression of it. The farther the picture goes into the casino the farther it gets from actuality in architecture, furnishings and gambling routine. Blackmer and Raquello, playing at a table, insult one another in tones which would have caused their expulsion as soon as the first insult was uttered. The hum of the roulette wheels and the soft drone of the croupiers are all the sounds one hears in a Monte Carlo gaming room. Oland and Luke leave the Casino, bound for Nice. They start in the right direction to take the Corniche Road down the hill, but they have adventures in scenic surroundings unlike any to be found there. Piffling fault-finding, you say? It is. But why make a picture that would invite even piffling criticism? Century was under no obligation to show us a story in Monte Carlo, but having located it there, it was under obligation to show us the real Monte Carlo. A wholly imaginary locale would have given the producer greater freedom in showing manners and customs as he pleased, against scenery of the studio's designing, and even the most piffling critic would have had no grounds for snapping at it. Eric von Stroheim, in a picture he made for Universal, showed us the real Monte Carlo, except for one minor detail -the terrace behind the Casino and overlooking the Mediterranean had a gravel surface in the picture instead of being paved with polished stone slabs as it actually is. I chided Von about it and he offered in his defence that the budget became exhausted just as paving people were about to duplicate the real terrace. It annoyed him dreadfully.

G. M. O. GIVES MORE OFFENSE . . .

• BULLDOG DRUMMOND'S REVENGE: Paramount; producer, G. M. O.; director, Louis King; assistant director, Dink Templeton; screen play by Edward T. Lowe; based on "The Return of Bulldog Drummond," by H. C. (Sapper) McNeile; film editor, Arthur Schmidt; art directors, Hans Dreier and Robert Odell; sound, Harry Mills and John Cope; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman; photographed by Harry Fischbeck, A.S.C.; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: John Barrymore, John Howard, Louise Campbell, Reginald Denny, E. E. Clive, Frank Puglia, Nydia Westman, Robert Gleckler, Lucien Littlefield, John Sutton, Miki Morita, Bennie Bartlett.

APPARENTLY there was not enough story in this one to give it sufficient length. Only upon that presumption can the inclusion of its silly comedy (?) be explained. But at least it is an honest picture. The General Manager's Office is announced as the producer, and publicly taking credit for it is a brave thing for the G. M. O. to do. But does G. M. O. stand for Greatly Manhandled Opus? If so, such a public confession is still more to the credit of the producers. This Drummond offering is so bad that it constitutes a fraud on the exhibitors who

are forced by Paramount to take it. The title would prepare one for a thrilling, consistent, fast moving crime drama. The cast names would prepare one for a picture worth seeing. The Paramount name should be a guarantee of a picture worth paying to see. But Bulldog Drummond's Revenge succeeds only in being a stupidly made picture. Its crime content is all right, but there is so little of it that other things have to be interpolated. There is no objection to that, provided the interpolations are woven smoothly into the whole pattern. But such results are not achieved. The producers, believing in the cinematic tradition that a picture is not a picture if it does not contain a romance, have forced one in. John Howard and Louise Campbell are about to be married when the picture starts, and the romance we see and hear is nothing but a series of threats by Louise that she will not marry John unless he changes his ways.

Comedy That Is Dreary . . .

NE can weary of repeated threats of the girl and pleadings of the boy. The romance in Drummond is the most wearisome I ever listened to. And the comedy (?) is even worse. It consists chiefly of Nydia Westman's piping in a peculiarly irritating voice and Reg Denny's bumping into everyone he meets. You'll simply die! And when you see the severed human hand which is used as a comedy prop, you'll laugh your head off. If you can discover any connection between the romance or the comedy and the story of the crime, you would rate higher as a detective than Bulldog Drummond himself. Louis King has given us some pictures exceedingly well directed. He must have faced great odds when directing this one, must have been under some strain which prevented him from noticing how loudly his people talked. On a busy platform in a London railway station, Nydia piercingly squeaks her lines; many people pass her without having their attention attracted to her unusual conduct, and we do not hear any of the station noises which should be a part of such a scene. We hear only that extremely irritating voice saying things not worth listening to and which have nothing to do with the story. Putting John Barrymore in such a production is a crime. But we must give him credit for being able to take it. He is one of the few stars who can afford to take

.. IN NEW LOCATION ...

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. OPTOMETRIST

1725 North Highland Avenue Hollywood, California HEmpstead 8438 such chances. His place as an artist is fixed too firmly to be affected by his appearance in a picture even as bad as this one. Saving graces are the performances of Barrymore, E. E. Clive, Frank Puglia and Robert Gleckler. Howard is coming along as a romantic lead, and Louise Campbell is pleasing even though handicapped by a role which makes of her nothing but a nuisance.

FANCHON DOES IT AGAIN . . .

● THRILL OF A LIFETIME; Paramount picture and release; produced by Miss Fanchon; directed by George Archainbaud; story by Seena Owen and Grant Garrett: screen play by Seena Owen, Grant Garrett and Paul Gerard Smith; film edited by Doane Harrison; art direction by Hans Dreier and Franz Bachelin; sound recorded by George Dutton and Don Johnson; photographed by William C. Mellor; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman; costumes by Edith Head; dances directed by LeRoy Prinz; Fanchonette dances staged by Carlos Romero; musical direction by Boris Morros; vocal supervision by Max Terr and Al Siegel; arrangements by Victor Young and Arthur Franklin; songs composed by Frederick Hollander, Sam Coslow and Carmen Lombardo and The Yacht Club Boys, Latt Dorothy Lamour, The Yacht Club Boys, Judy Canova, Ben Blue, Eleanore Whitney, Johnny Downs, Betty Grable, Leif Erikson, Larry Crabbe, Zeke Canova, Anne Canova, Tommy Wonder, Franklin Pangborn.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DRINGING into play her years of experience in **B** producing variety shows for the picture houses of the country, Fanchon, now Hollywood's only active woman producer, has concocted a potpourri of youth and gayety, music and dancing which should please everybody except introspective old grouches, and even some of them. It is very light fare, of course, with a story which is a mere bauble and a viewpoint as remote from reality as it could be. Plainly the picture's purpose is to wile away the cares of a troubled world; and this it should succeed in doing completely. Director George Archainbaud has handled the piece with a thorough appreciation of Fanchon's intentions, keeping its spirit airy and sparkling, the action staccato, the tempo rapid. What is lacking in subtlety in the acting of the young players is more than made up for by freshness and verve. The story centers around Camp Romance, an island resort run by an enterprising young man who assures romance to all his guests, being of the opinion that love is but a product which can be created at will by supplying the right devices—the moon, shining waters, music and the like. Needless to say, all the young people in some way or another have found their mates at the picture's conclusion, just as they do in some of Shakespeare's lighter pieces; and if you take a word of it seriously, it's your own fault. A good deal of ingenuity is shown by Seena Owen, Grant Garrett and Paul Gerard Smith, who did the screen play, in weaving so many lovebirds into the story fabric.

Plenty of Song ...

MUCH of the running time is consumed with specialty numbers, everyone taking his turn at some such performance. Many of the characters are supposed to be vaudeville actors. The specialty numbers

do not clog the movement of the film, however, being worked in as an integral part of the story. The final portion of the picture consists of a punchy show produced by the young man running the resort. He is eager to sell a play to a producer who has come to the island. Sam Coslow, Frederick Hollander and Carmen Lombardo have contributed most of the music and lyrics, all of which are pleasant, being set off to advantage by arrangements of Victor Young and Arthur Franklin, as well as by the musical direction of Boris Morros. Color is lent to the music by a frequent use of choral voices under the supervision of Max Terr and Al Siegel. The song Thrill of a Lifetime, sung throatily by the exotic Dorothy Lamour, should meet with considerable popularity. Two production tunes, written and performed by the Yacht Club Boys, have clever material in them, but, like most production numbers in pictures, could have been more carefully produced with respect to the use of the camera and the movement of the singers. Sometimes, when the boys are afar and anticking, their words are hard to follow.

Cast Is First-Rate . . .

UDY CANOVA registered in a big way with the J audience, both in her general comedy and in her remarkably variegated Hill Billy singing. She got over pathos in some scenes, too. Zeke and Anne Canova share her mourning in the Hill Billy songs. Her team mate, and ultimately her soul mate, made so by the flimsy device of being bitten by a love bug, is the elfin Ben Blue. A number they perform in classic garb with a balloon, this sequence being a dream, is one of the funniest sketches I have seen in some moons. Eleanore Whitney and Johnny Downs give some flashy exhibitions of the terpsichorean art, assisted by Tommy Wonder, who dances with uncommon grace. They are pleasing in their parts, though I do think Johnny should begin to modify the adolescence now. Betty Grable, a neglected secretary, shows much progress in the art of Thespis, and also sings and dances agreeably. The deepvoiced Leif Erikson vocalizes impressively, and Larry Crabbe, going in for versatility, sings and acts and puts on a diving exhibition. Franklyn Pangborn performs a sizable part with esprit. The dances are

Do You Like
GOOD FOOD — GOOD BEDS
AND ALL THE COMFORTS OF HOME?
Then Stop at the

SANTA MARIA INN SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA Frank J. McCoy, Manager

174 miles from Los Angeles—271 miles from San Francisco On Highway 101 imaginatively conceived by LeRoy Prinz. Cinematographer William C. Mellor has carried out the dream-world spirit of the film in an admirable way through a generous but skilful use of light. The finale is inventive, being a composition shot in which the principal couples in turn state and otherwise manifest that they have realized their objectives. Edith Head's costumes contribute a good measure of glamor to the production, and the sets of Hans Dreier and Frank Bachelin are exceptionally lavish. For once I think the assistant director should be mentioned, in this case Joseph Lefert, who must have had a whale of a time rounding up everybody.

ENTERTAINMENT VALUE SLIGHT . . .

 SWING IT, SAILOR; Grand National picture and release; produced by David Diamond; directed by Raymond Cannon; original story and screen play by Clarence Marks and David Diamond; photographed by Richard Fryer; film editor, Aaron Nibley: editorial supervisor, Gene Milford: assistant director, John Sherwood; art director, Louis Rachmil; unit manager, Gaston Glass; production manager, Harold Lewis; interior decorations by Stanley Murphy: technical advisor. Lieut. Comm. Geo. W. Dashiell; musical director. Abe Meyer. Cast: Wallace Ford, Ray Mayer, Isabel Jewell, Mary Treen, Cully Richards, Max Hoffman, Jr., Tom Kennedy, George Humbert, Alexander Leftwich, Kenneth Harlan, James Robbins, Rex Lease, Kernan Cripps.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DROVIDED you can be entertained by pictures which do not get much of anywhere and are slow about getting there, you will find Swing It, Sailor a treat. It excels in both respects. The scarcely novel yarn, about a sailor who steals the attentions of his buddy's sweetheart in order to keep him from quitting the navy for a trek to the altar, could have been told in ten minutes. Instead, it is strung out for sixy-five, padded with labored gags and irrelevant situations. When the very dense buddy finally finds out his pal is "two-timing" him, the former lets the latter have one on the beezer, and in retaliation the blond sweetheart beans the buddy with a vase, which leaves both prostrate on the floor. Whereupon the film launches on a long sequence of stock shots of naval maneuvers, picturing the bombing of an old ship for target practice. The impression is given that the story has run itself out, and that the audience is being treated to a newsreel in lieu of anything else to be shown. Eventually it develops that this bombing episode affords an opportunity for heroism to the two-timing gob, permitting



him to save the life of his buddy, a deed which reunites them. An earlier introduction of the two in this sequence, however, would help to dispel the impression of paucity in story material. Technically the picture is satisfactory. The photography of Richard Fryer is good, and the interior sets, designed by Louis Rachmil and decorated by Stanley Murphy are pleasant affairs.

Where Credit Is Due . . .

IRECTOR RAYMOND CANNON has done as much with the material as it permitted him to do. His scenes flow smoothly into each other, and the action itself he has kept breezy and rapid. Crisp action alone, however, has never been able to redeem a picture having static filmic flow, which grows out of story material. Wallace Ford and Ray Mayer, who play the two sailors, are both capable performers. Indeed, Ford has distinguished himself in earlier pictures. In this picture neither succeeds in capturing the whole-hearted interest of the audience, though some of their individual scenes are effective. As a team they are not well matched. For one thing, there seems to be insufficient conflict—always an element of good teams—between them; Mayer is so simplewitted that the tricks played upon him by the scheming Ford are like taking candy from a baby. If the Grand National people entertain any ideas of teaming the two in future pictures, I, for one, would advise against it. I daresay that excellent young actress, Isabel Jewell, is becoming satiated with having her performances made the object by the press of such puns as "A Jewell in the show," but such an expression insists on coming to my mind. Setting a prize example for integrity in an actress, she even bothers to characterize in this picture, when a straight ingenue performance would have gotten by. Her blond wench is indeed a nasal, saucy, designing little thing. Mary Treen is coming along as a comedienne. The calibre of her work in this picture might have been an asset to a better production.

LOUDER AND UNFUNNIER . . .

 HIGH FLYERS; RKO picture and release; produced by Lee Marcus: directed by Eddie Cline; screen play by Benny Rubin, Bert Granet and Byron Morgan; based on a play by Victor Mapes; musical direction by Roy Webb; songs by Dave Dreyer and Herman Ruby; photographed by Jack Mac-Kenzie: special effects by Vernon L. Walker: art director, Van Nest Polglase in association with Feild M. Gray: gowns by Renie; recording by John L. Cass: film editor. John Lockert. Cast: Bert Wheeler, Robert Woolsey, Lupe Velez, Marjorie Lord, Margaret Dumont, Jack Carson, Paul Harvey. Charles Judels, Lucien Prival, Herbert Evans, Herbert Clifton, George Irving.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

WITH the passage of years we have come to love these Wheeler and Woolsey comedies just as we love grandma's hand-knit comforter or grandpa's old meerschaum pipe. For some reason or other these boys have become a part of the tradition of the past and we feel an affection for them that we do for all things aged. This is not as things should be. Comedies should be new and sparkling, fresh and orig-

inal. Unfortunately, these ace comedians have not had the obvious benefit of a good script or good writing since their earliest pictures. High Flyers will hardly amuse Wheeler and Woolsey fans, unless they take some delight in seeing revivals. The dialogue is flat and the situations are not mirth-provoking. The characters are not drawn too well and the action might have been directed a little better. Added to which is the fact that few, if any of the screamed. This one was louder and unfunnier. Lupe screamed. This oen was louder and unfunnier. Lupe Velez is charming and vivacious. She has a definite flair for comedy, and, if given the right part, might be a fine, if not great, dramatic actress. It is crime enough to make the exhibitor show a bad comedy; a much greater crime to make good players act in it. An uncredited canine, Squeezie, did a fine job of acting; perhaps because he had good direction. Lucien Prival might have been good as one of the menaces had his Teutonic accent been consistent.

MUSIC IN RECENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

DERHAPS it is quite natural that motion picture producers should think in terms of singing when music is considered, besides that of an orchestra. Of course, we have with us fairly often the accompanist. He or she is usually half hidden by the piano and then goes through a swaying motion. That motion is just as convincing as the guitar-strumming of the operatic serenader. Of course, it is not very important that future screen accompaniments be shown without this bit of action, reminiscent of a ship rolling through the swells. Is it not customary for a girl to pull off the now-or-never ultimatum by facing her sweetheart most pleadingly? The sort of "Can't you understand?" pose; followed by a mingled sob and squeal of the never-want-to-see-you-again kind. And off she runs, while the handsome big brute is left floundering in a welter of dumbness and numbness, felt by big, strong men, struck inarticulate at the wrong time. It will be interesting to see how the accompaniments are managed for the new Grace Moore and the Gladys Swarthout pictures. Each of them contains a veritable concert repertoire. It was most agreeable to hear Stokowski play the piano without orchestral background. Needless to say he played superbly (in 100 Men and a Girl) and the occasion was managed quite convincingly from a dramatic angle. There has not yet been a great pianist on the screen, except for Paderewski.

Example of Choral Screen Art . . .

ONE of the cleverest and at the same artistically most polished examples of choral screen art were the "vocalstrations" in Double or Nothing, for which not sufficient credit was given to Max Terr. That in itself may be symptomatic of the synthetic nature of screen music. Altogether screen music recordings, from the writing of the music to the finished product, is the composite work of so many hands—or

shall I say: ears?—that public acknowledgment often does not go where it belongs. The gentleman, however, receives as a rule a liberal monetary compensation and lets it go at that. That process, I am not alone in thinking so, does not promote screen music as an art, and it reduces the artist to the mere status of the anonymous artisan. But as long as screen music scores are being turned out in the heat of hurry than in that of genuinely experienced emotion, screen music will rarely be the integral component of the entire production it should be. Apropos of the 'vocalstrations," quite apart of the convincing imitations of instruments by human voices, the sheer sound of these arrangements places them among the most fascinating and beautiful tonal effects in screen history. Green Pastures, which went through a revival showing, is disappointing already for the reason that the whole affair smacked of the choral recital. The Hall Johnson Choir is an excellent group. but they lack at times a subtleness and poesy which the yet less known Carlyle Scott Negro Choir possesses to a touching degree. Here is a group which could make money for a producer holding the right script. Scott has arrangements of his own of spirituals which should become wider property. Some of the best bits of vocal ensemble recording can be heard in the French film, The Golem. This new version is a great improvement over the one shown some ten years ago at the Filmarte. I am referred to the unaccompanied, ritual singing in the synagogue. Not only were the voices movingly expressive and dramatically convincing, but the director preserved that chaste and yet eloquent informality of over-lapping singing and responses with which each man addresses his god. At the very tempo his heart dictates. The recording was remarkable for the quality of pianissimo effects. It was lovely to hear softly ending incantations exquisitely prolonged by a wonderfully pure echo resonance. There was music also in every speaking voice.

Public Should Express Desires . . .

PROGRAMS of concert music, as a rule, are only as good as managers and artists think the public will accept them. The same applies to motion pictures. The margin of precautionary limitation as to the calibre of topic, as to intensity of expression, is probably kept greater by the producer of a picture in view of the larger investment. This is definitely so of screen-music. There will be little improvement unless music-enjoying cinema patrons express themselves. Unfortunately the man or woman relishing the finest in any field will rarely write a letter of approval. They are busy people, busy making a living, busy looking for the best. Their emotions and reactions are too real, too sacred to them to spread them on paper. They also have lost faith in the efficacy of letter-writing. The less-well-read are the readiest and most voluble patrons of the mail carrier. One is almost inclined to form a letter-writing society for the protection and perpetuation of the best on the concert stage, in theatre, on the screen, in public service. The individual in this land of "rug-

ged individualism" still believes that he or she "will not be heard." They forget that individuals form communities, form nation-wide constituences which can dictate policies—of music—and of peace. It is an old truth that music makes the world akin. Music as a harbinger of peace and goodwill to the individual and to a people. A great film, permeated with great music, borrowed or original, indeed could prove a document promoting an international entente cordiale.

SOUND OPINIONS

Bu Don Susano

MY young daughter went with me to see two silent pictures—The Last Command and Sunrise; part of the American Screen Classics sponsored by the Southern California Film Society and showing at the Filmarte. When I asked her how she liked them, she beamed enchanted: "More than talking pictures! Everything is more beautiful to look at, and the people seem more real." And then she added, "They had better actors in those old days."

I asked her if she missed the dialogue. Her answer was enlightening: "Not a bit! People talk more naturally, and everything is more natural. Besides you can see all that goes on." Since the pictures were silent, I asked her to explain what she meant by "talking more naturally." She cocked her head, very sure of herself. "Oh, you know. They look as if they mean everything they say—like when the beautiful lady was speaking, while in talking pictures sometimes the voices sound like they don't mean what they say. That's why I think they had better actors then." Incidentally, the "beautiful lady" was Evelyn Brent. Although it is a child's criterion, I attach enough importance to it to give it serious consideration.

Old and New Mediums . . .

WE grown-ups have witnessed the screen's transition at too close a range to be still sensitive to clear-cut impressions; whereas the child has been acquainted only with talking pictures, and silent pictures were to her a new world. Thus, to her, the comparison between the old medium and the new, was as sharply defined as hot and cold water. In silent pictures she discovered an appeal to her elemental emotions which to her seemed as truthful as every-day life. On the other hand, she evidently often felt an inexplicable falsity in talking pictures. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that she saw two outstanding cinematic achievements, the work of masters in the art of visual eloquence: Josef von Sternberg and the late F. W. Murnau. With the advent of sound much of the pictorial beauty has been replaced with words. But this is not all; the illusion of reality is more easily shattered in talking pictures than in the silent drama. I have in mind a spoken line in which the actor's delivery did not agree with his facial expression. And I have seen it happen even among finished artists. It is this discrepancy which has made my young daughter feel that "sometimes the voices sound like they don't mean what they say." Then there is the paradox of a too realistic sound destroying the illusion.

Effect of Loud Noise . . .

SUPPOSE that we are watching a scene of a passenger train arriving at a village depot. As long as the sound does not call attention to itself, or rather, as long as sound and vision are in harmony, the people, the houses along the track, the train, will seem to us as true as life itself. However, if suddenly our eardrums and our entire nervous system quiver in pain with the penetrating, loud shrill of a train whistle, the flesh and blood people, the stone houses, the solid iron train, which moments before seemed to us as concrete as life itself, at once dissolve to mere ghostly shadows upon a flat surface. The whistle packed too much physical body to be accepted by our intellect as belonging to that ethereal world before our eyes. And to our annoyance, we have become conscious of two distinctly separate mechanical identities, the sound and the visual action, just as when we abruptly realize that it is the ventriloquist, and not the dummy upon his knee, who is doing the talking.

Blends Sound and Vision . .

COUND is as temperamental as an excitable prima I dona, and to slap it on a picture without regard to audience reaction, but simply because there must be noise, is to defeat the very illusion of reality which sound should create. However, little use has been made of music to simulate sounds such as the train whistle, which could have been melodious instead of nerve-wracking. Music, instead of destroying the illusion, has the power to create it. If we hear a stirring martial air, our imagination is immediately filled with marching armies. At the crash of cymbals and of drums we hear cannons booming, wild yells of fighting men, pounding hoofs of charging steeds. And it is because music is of the same ethereal nothingness of which the ghostly shadows on the screen are made, it makes possible a harmonious blending of sound and vision, so essential in maintaining the illusion of reality.

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Hollywood 10 CENTS SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Twelfth Year

Los Angeles, California—December 4, 1937

Vol. 12-No. 24

"Few People Think, All People Feel"

College Professor Provides a Text for a Sermon on Screen Fundamental Appeal

We Are Handed An Original Film Story

And That Starts Us Off on a Discussion of Manner in Which Studios Treat Stories

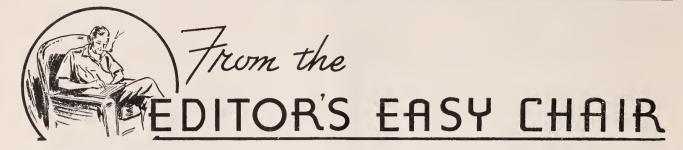
Music In Pictures Now Being Shown

Dr. Bruno David Ussher Constructively Discusses a Number of Current Scores

...REVIEWS...

ALCATRAZ ISLAND ★ BEG, BORROW OR STEAL ★ HEADIN' EAST YOU'RE ONLY YOUNG ONCE ★ THANK YOU, MR. MOTO

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



FEW PEOPLE THINK; ALL FEEL . . .

THEN Maude Adams stepped to the front of the stage upon which she was appearing in Peter Pan, and asked the audience earnestly, "Do you believe in fairies?" her answer came in an affirmative chorus from all parts of the house. It was over a score of years ago, and just the other evening the voice came to me by the radio. "We should know more about our emotions," Miss Adams said. "They are the most precious things we have. We should use them oftener." A college president on the same broadcast gave us this bit of wisdom: "Few people think. All people feel." When the screen was silent, its appeal was to all people, those who both think and feel, and those who only feel. When it went talkie, it narrowed its appeal, became entertainment only for those who think, and banished from its audience those who only feel and those who attended film theatres for rest from thinking. The most elemental reasoning should have kept picture producers from committing the blunder for which the film industry is paying so heavily now in lowered box-office receipts. It would have shown them that in going from silents to talkies, they were abandoning one business and embarking upon another fundamentally different from the old established one which had captured the fancy of the world. Let us do some fundamental reasoning for them.

Sound and Sight Impressions . . .

 $\mathbf{0}^{N}$ MY before-breakfast walk, let us suppose, I come upon a man brutally beating a dog. My reaction to it is spontaneous; my eyes take in the scene and my emotions respond to it instantly. My intellect is not involved. I do not think. I feel. Now let us suppose I am walking along, my mind occupied with planning my day's writing, and you come running towards me and tell me that around the next corner is a man beating a dog. Before I can grasp the meaning of what you say, my mind must go through a complete readjustment, must dismiss what I was was thinking about and convey to my pictorial sense the scene you are describing. Until I mentally can see a man beating a dog, I can get no meaning from your words. You know this to be true, for the instant you read above my supposition that I came upon a man beating a dog, your brain composed the scene; you

reacted to it mentally before it touched your emotions; you thought before you could feel. But when I see the man and dog, I feel before I think; and if the scene were of a different nature, a man playing with his dog, I feel the pleasure of it and give no thought to it; it would not demand mental effort on my part; I could smile at the scene and keep on thinking about my writing job. But, again, if you told me about it, I would have to go through a complete mental readjustment, see the scene, before I could derive any pleasure from it. It other words, listening to talk is mental effort; seeing something is not. Surely that is elemental enough to be grasped by even a motion picture producer.

Complete Mental Relaxation . . .

WHAT is our main quest when we seek entertainment? Mental relaxation. It would follow then, that we would derive the greatest satisfaction from the form of entertainment which provided the most complete mental relaxation. Our relaxation can not be complete if our aural sense and mental faculties have to cooperate before we can be entertained. It is complete only when our visual sense works alone in conveying impressions to our emotions. That is what silent pictures used to do. True, the printed titles involved some mental effort on our part, but we saw the pictures in a soothing atmosphere, in dimly lighted houses and with softly played musical accompaniment, and we took the titles in our stride, got used to them, and there were not enough of them to constitute a mental burden. We did a maximum of feeling and a minimum of thinking. Talkies reversed the process. They have made mental exercise of a form of entertainment which gained popularity because it was mental relaxation. Why, as this is being written (Thanksgiving morning) there are millions of people throughout the country converging on football fields? They are seeking visual entertainment which appeals directly to their emotions, which does not require the cooperation of the intellect—the same appeal as that of the true motion picture.

First, Study the Product . . .

THE foregoing reasoning would lead to the conclusion that the film industry would find a larger market for visual entertainment than it ever could develope for aural entertainment. At the present time

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No Cats

both producers and exhibitors are disturbed by the rapid decline in attendance at film theatres. In a falling market the wise manufacturer gives first thought to his product. That is something under his control. Are his sales dropping off because of some weakness in the product? If so, he can remedy it and recover some of his lost ground, in spite of the gravity of general conditions over which he has no control and which contribute to sales shrinkage. In an effort to stem the downward trend of the film business, motion picture producers are studying the cost of their product, not the nature of it. They went on a spending spree which taught their market to expect expensive pictures, and now to hold the market they propose to provide it with cheaper pictures at the same price they charged for the expensive ones. Never having grasped the fundamentals of their business, being unaware of the element in their product responsible chiefly for the establishment of its market, they refuse to concede any responsibility for present box-office conditions attached to them. They blame the recent collapse of the stock market. There was a rather hefty stock market collapse in 1929, and in 1930 the average weekly attendance at film theatres in this country was 110,000,000 according to official government figures. Prior to the beginning of the present business recession, unofficial estimates placed the average weekly attendance at something under 80.000.000.

We Suggest the Remedy . . .

CONSIDERING still further the merits of the contention that the present business depression is responsible for lessened box-office receipts, we find that while it was two years after the beginning of the former greater depression before film box-offices felt the full force of it, this year the box-office depression began some months before the stock market collapse ushered in the new general business depression. The producers' alibi scarcely can stand up in face of these facts. So convinced is the Spectator that the nature of the film industry's product is such that it cannot maintain a peak market, it predicted the box-office slump of the early '30s, but along came the depression to claim credit for it. This time, however, the box-office slump started before the business slump, which puts it up to the producers to explain in some other way why they are not holding their market. People who think in screen terms know why. It is because Hollywood is forcing aural entertainment on a market established by visual entertainment, a market which wants to see its stories, not listen to them, which wants to exercise its emotions, not its intellect. The market will continue to decline until it is provided with product the public will buy. I would recommend to producers that the words of the college president be used as a motto to hang on the walls of all studio offices in which creative screen artists work: "Few People Think. All People Feel." There is the prescription for the cure of all the ailments the film industry is suffering.

SOME INCOMING MAIL . . .

ANNA NEAGLE—Her Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria—shares the Spectator's view of screen acting. We had a talk about it during her visit here, and in a going-away note she writes: "It was so interesting to meet you and discuss the subject of screen acting, about which we both feel so strongly. Of course, I personally believe in characterization, but played absolutely realistically and naturally." Miss Neagle's preparation for her part in Victoria The Great was to absorb the character, to live with it prior to enacting it, to feel it so completely that the mechanics of her performance were her involuntary, automatic response to her feelings. She did not strive to project her characterization, to play to the audience. She allowed the camera to do that. . . . The Spectator's recent plea to Charlie Chaplin to make an anti-war picture, meets the approval of readers. Mr. and Mrs. Earl Beard, Westminster, Indiana, write. "We want to tell you how much we appreciated your editorial addressed to Charlie Chaplin. The world certainly needs just such a picture with just such a man as Mr. Chaplin to help it get its confused mind in order." . . . Also from Westminster writes Mrs. Mamie Tuckenbaugh: "I want to thank you for your extremely timely and logical argument addressed to Mr. Chaplin. You certainly are right when you say the world is confused, frightened, not knowing what it is all about. If shown a better way, the world will follow it. How better to get it started than through the medium of the screen?" . . . Mrs. J. A. Cadwallader, Yardley, Pennsylvania, writes: "Please continue to urge this and I want to congratulate you on your peace ideals. It is just such people as you who can do the most to keep America out of war." . . . And from Mrs. Robert Humphreville, Clarinda, Iowa, comes this: "I think an anti-war film would be great. So many people see the movies and they can be such a power in education if so used. I do like a good movie, and of course I know they can not make them without sin entirely, but, it seems to me that they could be censored better. However, I suppose some people would say that was wrong. So each person can censor them himself by only going to those recommended. The world loves Charlie Chaplin and his 'Little Man,' and I do think it would be marvelous if he would make a movie against war. I am quite sure it would make money, too. I am only a housewife of the middle west, but vitally interested in our own government and world affairs. I am so sorry for China."

And Still They Come . . .

SINCE the above paragraph was put in type, the mailman has brought us other similar expressions from various parts of the country. John Warren Day, Dean of the Grace Cathedral, Topeka, Kansas, has this to say: "Thank you a million for the splendid editorial to Charles Chaplin. I hope that it may have a very salutary effect and that he may do something about it before it is too late." . . . Florence G. Brown, Ogden, Utah, writes: "Your suggestion of

an anti-war film endorsing Mr. Chaplin for the role is a splendid idea. It is fine to learn that the Hollywood Spectator is so ably edited and its critical analyses of motion picture plays unbiased and practical." . . . From Julia I. Felsenthal, Chicago: "I have just read your suggestion and following correspondence from Miss Mary Born that Charlie Chaplin be urged to make an anti-war film. I fervently hope he will, and soon. Thank you for your idea." ... Writing from the Kansas State College at Man hattan, Kansas, Jesse L. Brenneman says: "I congratulate you upon your editorial in the Hollywood Spectator urging an anti-war film. I hope the suggestion 'takes' in Hollywood." . . . Miss B. E. At-kins, Spokane, Washington, who recently returned from China, writes: "Your idea of an appearance of Charlie Chaplin in an anti-war film is fine. It would be tremendously effective. Having just returned from Shanghai, I want everything possible, even more than ever, done to prevent war. Incidentally, I recall that the only movie the small Chinese boy at our house ever asked for was 'Charlie Chaplin again.' He continually hoped for that actor's return in a film. Try to get Mr. Chaplin to do it." . . . And the following comes from Samuel C. Spalding, of Gould Farm, Great Barrington, Massachusetts: have been very much impressed by your editorial on the Mary Born letter. Miss Born has made an unusually striking suggestion; and your eloquent endorsement of it carries exceptional weight because of your great familiarity with artistic values and boxoffice successes and failures. We have a little group of peace-minded men and women at this unique social service and convalescent farm in the Berkshires. We have sent anti-war letters to our Senators and Congressman, and to the President, signed at times by as many as twenty to thirty voters. I am sure we should all be delighted to be able to see Charlie Chaplin 'Present Arms' as they really are in all their folly and futility." . . . Dr. E. L. Harshbarger, Dean of Bethel College, Kansas, says: "Congratulations on your editorial in the November 6 issue of Hollywood Spectator relative to the suggestion that Charlie Chaplin be engaged to dramatize the warweary world in moving pictures. The suggestion is a fine one and Miss Born and yourself are to be congratulated on making an effort towards its realization.'

OTHER HALF HEARD FROM ...

WHEN I can induce Mrs. Spectator to talk about pictures, she says things so worthwhile that I make a note of them and later pass them on to you as my own, feeling that the ethics of the practice can be defended on the ground that in California we have a community property law which gives husband and wife joint interest in all their possessions. Her half interest in her picture ideas lies in her expression of them, mine in recording them. For instance, last Sunday when we were driving leisurely over country roads, she remarked that Claudette Colbert had the

loveliest and most expressive hands in pictures, that she could say more with her hands than many actresses can in dialogue. And Carole Lombard's voice, according to Mrs. Spectator, is the most expressive; she can put over in two or three words, plus the inflection of her voice, more than most girls can in a long sentence. Another: No one else on the screen can say as much with her hair as Constance Bennett can; with one shake of her blonde head she can express a whole lot that most girls would have to put into words. And Barbara Stanwyck has the most eloquent eyes. And speaking of Barbara, it is Mrs. Spectator's opinion that Bob Taylor has done a whole lot for that charming young woman. Taking the newspaper chatter at its face value and assuming that Barbara and Bob are in love, we may credit her happiness-Mrs. Spectator speaking-with the greater feeling and assurance she now is displaying on the screen; that two or three years ago, when she was a troubled young woman, she would have been incapable of rising to such heights as she achieves in her Stella Dallas characterization. Bob, in Mrs. Spectator's opinion, is just a nice boy who has been the victim of the most stupid publicity and fame so sudden and stupendous that it is vastly to his credit that through it all he has kept his head and retained all the naturalness he brought with him to Hollywood. When Bob gets back from England, I think I will get Barbara and him to come out to the Valley and have a quiet dinner which will end up with to each of us a quarter of one of Mrs. Spectator's super-perfect lemon pies.

WE READ AN ORIGINAL STORY . . .

DECENTLY I read an original screen story, the **N** work of a new writer who asked me if I would look it over and suggest any changes he should make before submitting it to a studio. In my time I have read a lot of original scripts, but I cannot recall having read another so laugh provoking as this new writer's. It is a comedy with a Hollywood background, the amusing complications piling up until the final sequence is reaching an end; then everything is straightened out suddenly and satisfactorily. It would not make a noisy, hilarious picture. To the people in it, it is a serious affair, and the more serious it becomes to them, the funnier it would be to the audience. The evening I read it, a writer friend dropped in, a man who has bought many a screen story in his day, but who is not in pictures now. I told him the story and asked him what he thought of it. "A honey!" he exclaimed. "Any studio will go for it. It will make an exceedingly clever comedy." Next day the author came for his script and my advice. I told him he had a winner, that he should set a high price and stick to it, and that he should not make a change in a line of it, that, as written, he had a comedy any studio would jump at. From a briefcase he had with him, the author drew some clipped-together papers and handed them to me. They were rejection slips. The comedy already had gone the rounds and had been

turned down by every studio in Hollywood. He had not told me, as he feared it would influence my opinion of the story's merits.

Mr. Blank Had Not Heard of It . . .

WHEN I read the script, I was not seeing only words; I was seeing scenes on the the voices of real people giving life to the typed dialogue, and seeing in their eyes the players' mental reaction to the complications which assailed them; I was getting screen entertainment, not literary entertainment, from the script. I wondered, after reading the rejection slips a second time, if my dozen years of estimating the values of screen stories after they reached the screen, had given me a too exalted opinion of my ability to pick one in a script. Some of the rejections were in forms of letters, one of them stating the writer had been "instructed by Mr. Blank to return your story as unsuited to our present requirements." I phoned Blank. He never had heard of the story, supposed it might have passed through his hands in the form of a disparaging synopsis which he had initialed for rejection, had to take the word of his readers, had no time to read submitted stories. RKO, which returned the story without comment, paid \$255,000 for Room Service, which cannot come to the screen as more amusing entertainment than this original story would provide if given intelligent production; spent for one stage play sufficient money to supply it with a whole year's story material if it did not share with the rest of the industry the hallucination that an original story must be without merit if its author's name is not famous.

Their Idea of Criticism . . .

WE HEAR a great deal about story shortage, talent shortage, shortage of this and that Every shorts shortage, shortage of this and that. Every shortage mentioned is the film industry's own creation. In the files of each of the major organizations is enough story material to last it for ten years of production activity. And out of work in Hollywood are enough trained screen writers to bring the material up to date and put it in form for shooting. The weakness of the prevailing system of handling story material is that the salaries paid readers are too small to attract the kind of readers studios should have. How much would a reader have been worth to RKO if he had been instrumental in having the studio purchase, say for \$5,000, the original story which inspired these comments, instead of the play for which it paid \$255,000? The answer can be reduced to simple arithmetic. On can realize the psychological approach of a small-salaried reader to the task of estimating the screen values of a submitted manuscript. He feels he is a critic, that it is his critical sense the studio is paying for. In common with a majority of critics, he feels his mission in life is to pick holes in the thing criticized. The holes are what he looks for, and if he can find but few, he magnifies them until they seem to be a lot. He is afraid to turn in a favorable report, for that would mean a higher-up would read the manuscript and any weakness in his judgment would be revealed. The easiest way out, the

only one which assures the continuance of his name on the studio payroll, is to condemn everything which comes his way. On no other premise can I account for the fact that the story I read apparently never reached anyone in a studio who could read it intelligently. Only trained screen minds can recognize screen values in a submitted manuscript. reader cannot know if the story meets the demands of the screen if he does not know what the demands

IT IS TO BE EXPECTED . . .

THERE may be some truth in the report that Darryl Zanuck is determined to make a real actress ryl Zanuck is determined to make a real actress out of Shirley Temple. It is inevitable that some producer will make an effort to improve on God.

ACTORS AND BALES OF COTTON . . .

TARIFF laws protect the product of American I manufacturers. Immigration laws protect American workmen. The National Capital now is exercising its collective brain seeking ways to assist American business. Acting is the sole business of thousands of Hollywood people. No one, not even the Screen Actors' Guild, is giving full protection to that business. Although there are here already a dozen people for every available job, we read in the papers every day that this or that studio has signed another Georgia girl, Louisiana lad or Polish player to come to Hollywood and increase the acting competition here. Immediately upon arrival the newcomer is given the protection of the Guild, one of whose old members must move aside to give the newcomer a job. The Hollywood player who is not under contract to a studio, is not given as much protection as the Capital gives a bale of cotton. Picture producers are harming their business by their utterly ridiculous belief that the public wants new faces. If they were equipped with minds which would justify the size of their salaries, they would know the public desires to see the same supporting players in successive pictures for the same reason it desires to see the same stars in them. In all human activities we like to have our friends around us. When we go to a film theatre it should be like going to a social function we should anticipate having an agreeable time by contact with old friends, by feeling at home because we see familiar faces. Perhaps we do not know the names of some of the people we see, but that is a matter of indifference; we know their faces, have seen them before, feel at home with them.

Up, Guild, and At Em! . . .

WHEREVER we go in Hollywood we encounter old friends. We cannot recall the names of many of them, but their faces are familiar. They are actors out of work, but giving the greatest performances of their careers—playing that fortune has been kind to them, that they have nothing to worry about, that their agents are lining up jobs for them. They know they are acting, and they know we know it, and that

is what makes their performances so pathetically perfect. The music we hear in the background is that of the Screen Actors' Guild band marching to the railroad station to welcome a newly arriving actor. The Guild has done and is doing a great deal of good both to its members and to producers, but it has left undone the job which should be its first concern—giving full protection to its members whose business is acting. Industry long since learned that what is best for labor is best for capital. Industry was forced into acceptance of the reasonable demands of labor, but would refuse now to go back to the old way of doing things, even if labor were acquiescent. For its own good, and apart from consideration of the human aspect of it, the film industry should be forced to protect those who have served it long and faithfully. Plainly it is the duty of the Guild to make such a demand on the industry and to use its great strength to force the industry to comply with it. If the industry will not agree to call in its talent scouts and use only the talent already here, the Guild should refuse membership to any new player until he or she had lived in Hollywood for a full year. And if the officers of the Guild will not take such action, the members themselves should hold a rousing mass meeting and attend to the job themselves. The prosperous actor of today is concerned as much as is the jobless one. There are tomorrows.

IT IS OLD STUFF TO US ...

ADOLPH ZUKOR returned to Hollywood following a European trip, and among the announcements he made upon his arrival was, "Perfected television will offer no more opposition to motion pictures than they have to meet today;" which seems to me to mean it will offer no competition whatever. If Mr. Zukor will dig up a certain Spectator dated some three or four years ago, he will find not only the same statement, but will find fully set forth the fundamental reasons why television never will be a competition of the motion picture.

NEW YORK'S WESTERN BOUNDARY . . .

MANY times the Spectator has stated that in as far as its influence on picture box-office goes, New York stops at the Hudson River. It is the least American of all American cities and it thinks in terms peculiarly its own. Long ago I gave up reading reviews of pictures appearing in New York papers, but I never miss the What the Picture Did for Me department in Motion Picture Herald, in which exhibitors all over the country write illuminating thumbnail reviews inspired by box-office returns. Since Robert Welsh became associated with Norman Webb in the publication of National Box-Office Digest, it has been devoting a page to the reproduction of picture reviews from New York papers. In a recent issue Bob quotes from a letter which tells him where he gets off. Earle N. Holden, manager of the Capital Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia, asks Bob a couple of questions: "Why do you waste a page of your

valuable space on those New York reviews? Don't you know the exhibitors long ago learned that what New York thinks doesn't mean a damn thing?" It is too bad Hollywood producers do not take the exhibitors' view of New York. If they did, they would not pay such outlandish prices for New York plays as screen story material, on the assumption that New York's approval had box-office value in Atlanta. We are grateful to Mr. Holden for stating as a fact what the Spectator necessarily had to advance as a theory.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

MARQUEE of Olympic Theatre, 8th Street: I Take This Woman, Death Takes a Holiday; seems fair enough. . . . Sure something was the matter with my heart; visited my doctor; long examination; he shakes his head; says another thorough examination necessary; to come back in twenty years and he would make it. . . . The spaniel has been entertaining himself by galloping around me while I sit writing on the edge of the lawn; he has a hard rubber ball which he tosses in the air and then chases; just now the ball landed in the bird bath during the morning abolutions of a number of its steady customers; now the baring branches of the locust tree beneath which the bath is located, are alive with angry linnets who are cursing Freddie soundly, and I feel some of them are cocking an accusing eye at me. . . . Walter Abel, with his two manly boys, trying to locate a riding-ponies-for-hire place in the Valley; I have an uneasy suspicion now that if they followed my directions they got farther from it; Walter's personality and acting ability should keep him busy in big pictures. . . . We have nasty winds in the Valley; purely as winds they are all right, generally soft, warm, gentle, but as soon as I get the leaves raked up, a nasty little zepher makes a tree shudder down another batch. . . . I'm a rather bright fellow, quick on the mental trigger, so to speak; I prepare the feed for Alexandra and Sophie, our two ducks; before I had mixed it by hand for not more than nine months, I thought up the idea of stirring it with a stick, so the stick could get smelly instead of my hands; smart, what? . . . Funny thing the way other papers and people are posing as instigators of the war on radio gossipers; however, the Spectator doesn't mind, even though it was months ahead of all other papers in urging something should be done; it is content to start action, to let others take the bows. . . . As a matter of fact, the only people the Spectator cares two hoots about are its readers; they know this great moral weekly started the fuss, and the rest of the world can go hang. . . . I wish newspapers would cease publishing photographs of people kissing; they make me sick, and I think people who allow photographers to shoot them in such poses make a vulgar public display of something which is innately tender and personal. . . . And having got that off my chest, I will toddle to the printer's with this bunch of stuff, come back and start writing another Spectator. Ho, hum!

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

MR. FOY GOES TO TOWN . . .

● ALCATRAZ ISLAND: Warner Brothers-First National; produced by Bryan Foy; directed by William McGann; original screen play by Crane Wilbur. Cast: John Litel, Gordon Oliver, Vladimir Sokoloff, Ben Welden, Peggy Bates, Anderson Lawlor, Ellen Clancy, Matty Fain, Walter Young, Lane Chandler, Ann Sheridan, Mary Maguire, Dick Purcell, Addison Richards, George E. Stone, Doris Lloyd, Charles Trowbridge, Veda Ann Borg, Edward Keane, Ed Stanley.

AD the film industry taught the public to buy H product instead of people, Alcatraz would be among the notable box-office successes of the year. It is meeting with favor and is making money wherever shown, but because it lacks the names of some of our most expensive stars, it is not receiving the attention its merits entitle it to. For some reason, which Bryan Foy, its producer, explained to me so explicitly and at such length that I have no idea what he said, the picture was not given a press preview prior to its release, hence the lateness of my review in relation to its current showing at the Warner theatres. Alcatraz is another film production which demonstrates that a good picture can be turned out at a cost quite a long way this side of a million dollars. As a matter of fact, this Foy production cost just about what any picture would cost if the film industry had been governed wisely from the start. But when we attend a motion picture theatre the cost of the picture we are going to see is not a determining factor in our selection of an evening's entertainment. Each picture competes with each of the others on the basis of entertainment quality, not on the size of the figures when cost sheets are totalled.

Is a Fine Writing Job . . .

VIEWED from any standpoint, Alcatraz alone is a thoroughly satisfactory piece of entertainment which warrants your patronage without consideration of the merits of any other picture which keeps company with it on a double bill. Crane Wilbur wrote it directly for the screen, and a brilliant example of screen writing it proves to be. The opening scenes enlist our interest; they are varied, with no obvious relationship, but as the film unwinds, Crane draws them together with marked skill until they converge with the relationship cleverly established, to a sudden and dramatic climax which thrills the audience; then comes a brief scene which gives promise of happy tomorrows, and the picture ends. It is a story of contrasts, of a sweet and innocent girl and a worldly wise gangster's moll; of an upright and conscientious public prosecutor and an unprincipled criminal's mouthpiece; of a master criminal with his own code of ethics which precludes murder, and lower types to whom killing is part of their business routine—all drawn together with dramatic force into a logical, swiftly moving and interest-compelling script vastly to the credit of its author and demonstrating that Crane Wilbur is a screen writer of outstanding ability.

Evenly Balanced Cast ...

HIS restricted budget does not entitle Bryan Foy to our sympathy. It proves one of the picture's assets, one of the elements responsible for its excellence. A class B production to start with—although it emerged with greater entertainment quality than the majority of class A's-its producer was hampered in selection of a cast by no obligation to have characterizations drawn to come within the capabilities of established stars, and to have the minor roles tailored to keep secondary players from dimming the glories of the expensive big names. He had unrestricted latitude in his selection of people to suit the parts-to make it a free-for-all competition for acting honors. And so wisely did Foy distribute the parts that all the contestants come under the wire together, those carrying the lighter weights giving as good account of themselves as those to whom were assigned the greater burdens. John Litel, by virtue of having the chief motivating role and ability to do it full justice, gives a compelling, penetrating performance which attracts the most attention, his characterization of a racketeer, with some moral scruples, being a masterly study in dramatic effectiveness. Addison Richards, as Litel's lawyer, provides another of those honest, velvety smooth performances we long since have learned to expect from him. Gordon Oliver is thoroughly competent and ingratiatingly agreeable in the role of the young prosecutor. He seems to me to possess everything it takes to make a successful leading man. Dick Purcell is another who deserves mention, as well as Ben Welden, a gangster who is murdered in prison, and Vladimir Sokoloff, who does the murdering, all of whom are perfect in their parts.

Technically Fine: Direction, Splendid . . .

ALCATRAZ gives me my first glimpse of a young woman whose generous exploitation made me anxious to see her—Mary Maguire. I found she justified all the promises held out for her. Possessed of good looks, charming personality and acting ability, she soon should earn wide popularity. Ann Sheridan puts warmth and understanding into the part she plays, her beauty being one of the visual delights in a picture dealing so largely with the drab aspects of our social structure. Another young woman who attracted my attention even though her part was a short one, is Peggy Bates who played Mary's governess. She has a lovely speaking voice, expressive, musical as a well toned bell; and, in addition, the brief glimpses I got of her convinced me she is a talented young woman with an appealing personality the screen could use to its advantage. A graceful contribution to the picture is that of Doris Lloyd, whom we do not see as often as we should. In all its physical aspects Alcatraz measures up to the writing and acting standard, the work of Art Director E. Hartley and Cameraman Lew O'Connell as well as the film editing of Frank Dwyer, being big factors in the general satisfaction the picture is giving. (Continued on page 10)

EXHIBITORS' MONTHLY BUYING GUIDE

★ The Buyers' Guide appeared for the first time in the first issue in November and will appear in the first issue of each month. It has met with hearty response from exhibitor readers, a number of whom, in course of letters commending it, have suggested we include the running time of the pictures listed, a request we comply with. An interesting feature of the correspondence the Guide prompted is the number of letters from non-exhibitor readers who state they use it to determine what pictures they desire to see.

(The figure after each title designates the date in November on which the review appeared in the Spectator)

CONN PRODUCTIONS

★ SWING IT, PROFESSOR (20)—If they like Pinky Tomlin they will like it. Full of swing music, singing and gangsters; moves along nicely and will please those who are not too critical. Running time, 66 minutes.

GRAND NATIONAL

- ★ MR. BOGGS STEPS OUT (20)—Good comedy, excellent cast, headed by the always pleasing and amusing Stuart Erwin. Story has an industrial slant which keeps it out of the usual run of present screen fare. Your only problem is getting them in; if you succeed, you will not have to apologize to them as they come out. Running time, 67 minutes.
- ★ SWING IT, SAILOR (13)—Not enough story to give the director a chance to make a picture to hold continuous interest, or to provide the cast members with characterizations they could get their teeth into. But Hollywood is turning out a lot of pictures of the same sort, so there must be a market for them. This one is not important but it is by no means the worst one of its kind Hollywood has produced. Running time, 65 minutes.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

- ★ THE LAST GANSTER (20)—Will not disappoint Edward G. Robinson fans, but will disappoint those who like a lot of laughs in their screen entertainment; no laughs in it, just a gripping, tense drama of an Al Capone character enacted before a background of prison atmosphere; nice romance shared by Jimmy Stewart and a new girl, Rose Stradner, who will make a hit with your people. You can exploit it as a picture which strikes a new note in gangster films. Running time, 90 minutes.
- ★ NAVY BLUE AND GOLD (20)—Metro's main entry in the football tournament; to my way of thinking, the best football picture we have had; good use made of Annapolis Academy as background; names of Robert Young, James Stewart and Tom Brown should mean something to your public. You can exploit it as the most satisfying picture of the sort you have shown, and if you haven't said the same thing about other pictures less satisfying, you should have good houses. Running time, 95 minutes.
- ★ THOROUGHBREDS DON'T CRY (20)—Boisterous action, exciting race track scenes, a rousing song, some humor. Preview audience went for it in a big way, but critical patrons will find all its potentialities are not developed by the direction. Story revolves around a boyy Ronald Sinclair, which should make it appeal to your youngsters. Cast a strong one and production up to Metro's high standard. Should give satisfaction. Running time, 80 minutes.

MONOGRAM

★ COUNTRY FAIR (27)—Essence of plot and characterization simplicity; simple but not dull or colorless; race horse atmosphere, but human; rich in rural types; nothing particularly new in the story, but it is told in refreshing way; not a big picture and without big box-office

names, but it will entertain pleasantly. Running time, 73 minutes.

★ FEDERAL BULLETS (6)—Action story; too talkative, but still a neat little programmer which will hold the attention of your audiences; no exploitation values. Running time, 62 minutes.

PARAMOUNT

- ★ NIGHT CLUB SCANDAL (6)—Cast better than the story material, but the performances are good enough to hold it up; if you do not promise too much, your people may like it; a detective-story picture in which detectives will offend sensitive patrons by indulging in wisecracks over the corpse of the murder victim. But a picture with John Barrymore in it cannot be a total loss. His performance is excellent. On a double bill the picture will hold up its end. Running time, 70 minutes.
- ★ THE BARRIER (6)—Made by the man who made the Hopalong Cassidy westerns which seem to have cleaned up everywhere; beautiful outdoor scenes; wide in geographic scope, and a great deal of vigorous, he-man stuff against a background of rugged northern scenery; outstanding performances by Leo Carrillo, Robert Barrat, Andy Clyde and Sarah Haden. It should please your patrons. Running time, 90 minutes.
- ★ BULLDOG DRUMMOND'S REVENGE (13)—Nothing whatever to recommend it. In my review I state it "is so bad it constitutes a fraud on the exhibitors who are forced by Paramount to take it." If you have to take it, better put it on the shelf. Running time, 55 minutes.
- ★ THRILL OF A LIFETIME (13)—Light fare, airy, sparkling; one you need not be afraid of; given good direction by George Archainbaud who deftly weaves into the story pattern the specialty numbers of which the picture so largely is composed; a good production, well photographed to give the whole considerable visual appeal. Not one of the massive music-dance productions, but one which will please. Running time, 72 minutes.
- ★ TRUE CONFESSION (27)—Carole Lombard again; that should be sufficient for your patrons; Fred MacMurray and Una Merkel to back her up; Carole gives one of her greatest performances; funny picture all the way through; will give universal satisfaction. Running time, 75 minutes.

REPUBLIC

* PORTIA ON TRIAL (6)—Excellent; writing, direction, acting, sets measure up to big studio standard; if Republic is going to keep up the pace set by this one, you had better keep your eye on it, and keep in mind the name of the producer, Albert Levoy. Neil Hamilton, prominent in the cast, is an old favorite your people will be glad to see again; all parts well taken, the cast being a strong one. You will have more trouble getting them in than you will have in satisfying them when they are in. Go as far as you like in exploiting it; it will back up all you can say. Running time, 72 minutes.

★ MANHATTAN MERRY-GO-ROUND (13) — Another Republic winner in its class; a name cast and really good specialty acts cleverly worked into the story to allow it to move along smoothly; refreshingly new ideas all the way through and not the standard music-dance story which has been worn threadbare; does not need a teammate to make a program complete, but if yours is a purely dual-bill house, Manhattan is strong enough to carry a weak sister along with it. Running time, 82 minutes.

R-K-O

- ★ A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS (27)—All your damsels will be in distress if they do not see Fred Astaire in this one; some critics were lukewarm in their reviews, but I thought it enjoyable all the way through; a really funny story, acted and directed to develop all its story values; Astaire's dancing, of course, superlative as always, particularly one number with an array of drums which you can exploit as alone being worth the price of admission. Running time, 100 minutes.
- ★ HIGH FLYERS (13)—Wheeler-Woolsey are not holding the audience they first won. Their pictures too much alike. This one about on a par with the others; perhaps not as good as some; if your people still go for the team, you know what this one will do in your house. Running time, 72 minutes.
- ★ LIVING ON LOVE (6)—A program offering which will cause some laughter but will not create a sensation; run-of-the-mill product aimed at double-bill showing; without draw names and with a trite story with nothing particularly new in it; nothing much in it to exploit, but will get by if it keeps company on your screen with a fairly strong mate. Running time, 60 minutes.
- ★ QUICK MONEY (27)—This will please your family trade; abounds in rugged, wholesome humor and fast action; really excellent entertainment which does not go overboard with expense to make it cost you a lot. Fred Stone's characterization fits him like a glove and all other performances are good. Exploit it as entertainment for the whole family and your patrons will not be disappointed. Running time, 59½ minutes.
- ★ VICTORIA THE GREAT (20)—Unquestionably one of the finest pictures ever to come from England, and the finest purely biographical picture ever made. Fare, however, only for intelligent audiences. If in your territory any schools teach Motion Picture Appreciation, you can exploit this picture as one for study. Technically a beautiful job; also a warmly human and visually beautiful film. Running time, 114 minutes.
- ★ DANGER PATROL (27)—Started as a B and slipped into A class; camera relied upon for much of the story telling, something your people will like; story deals with handling dynamite, and will keep audience in suspense for fear everything in sight will be blown up any minute; one you are safe in showing, but it may be too gripping for the nerves of your youngest customers. Running time, 60 minutes.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

★ CHARLIE CHAN AT MONTE CARLO (13)—The best of the series, to my way of thinking; but you know what a Chan picture can do to your box-office, so I need say no more than that your patrons will be satisfied plenty with this one if they liked the others. If you have not shown any of them, why not get the whole series and run them two or three weeks apart? Has it ever been done? The series as a whole should not cost you much, and there would be cumulative box-office value in running them at short intervals. Running time, 65 minutes.

- ★ SECOND HONEYMOON (13)—Tyrone Power and Loretta Young as a team should have box-office value; here you have them in a sparkling comedy which will give general satisfaction; it has a strong cast, one member a newcomer, Marjorie Weaver, who is going places if handled with ordinary sense. Light and joyous fare, the usual complete Century production, and, with only a couple of lapses, good direction by Walter Lang. Running time, 84 minutes.
- ★ BIG TOWN GIRL (20)—Good cast; fine performance by clever Claire Trevor. Good entertainment; has suspense, comedy and a pleasing romance which Claire shares with the agreeable Donald Woods. Well directed and produced. Rates a bit higher than usual run of program pictures. Running time, 66 minutes.

UNITED ARTISTS

- ★ NOTHING SACRED (27)—One of those honest and complete productions you always can expect from Dave Selznick; probably all your public need be told is that Carole Lombard heads the cast; Technicolor photography which may mean something in your town, although I cannot imagine why; good supporting cast and direction which makes humorous an inherently drab and pathetic theme; will make good all the exploitation you give it. Running time, 75 minutes.
- ★ THE HURRICANE (13)—The hurricane will stun your people into the belief it is a great picture; is great pictorially and technically, but is not a great motion picture as it lacks the emotional appeal a picture must have to be great; but the hurricane is the most extraordinary thing the screen has done in the way of special effects; go as far as you like in exploiting it as a thriller; casting of two inexperienced young people as parties to the romance is a weakness which makes the story drag until the wind begins to blow; all in all, it is a picture you need not be afraid of if you do not have to mortgage your house to pay the rental. Running time, 102 minutes.

UNIVERSAL

★ A GIRL WITH IDEAS (6)—A story with ideas which are not fully realized in the picture despite expert direction by Sylvan Simon, a new director who will bear watching. Has excellent cast without box-office names; a newspaper story without anything big in it; if you show it, give it a strong team-mate, if you have one available, and do not promise too much. Running time, 70 minutes.

WARNER BROTHERS

- ROMANCE OF LOUISIANA, MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY (6)—Two short subjects in color; of surpassing merit; informative and entertaining; either of them will add dignity to any evening's program; would be of immense help when you are dubious about the strength of your feature picture; good enough for marquee mention; keep in mind the names of Bryan Foy, producer, and Crane Wilbur, director, and be on the lookout for anything else with which their names are connected.
- ★ SUBMARINE D-1 (20)—A good one; thrills, drama, some laughs; informative as to navy routine; names of Pat O'Brien and George Brent should have box-office value; some striking surface and undersea photography. All in all a picture which will back up whatever exploitation you give it. Running time, 100 minutes.
- ★ SH! THE OCTOPUS (20)—Rather involved story designed to scare the audience and make it laugh; should succeed in doing both, Hugh Herbert and Allen Jenkins being responsible for the laughs. The whole thing is a dream, its treatment nightmarish at times; will keep your audience awake and on the edge of its seats; should do good business if not over exploited. May prove rather strong fare for children. Running time, 55 minutes.

REVIEWS

(Continued from page 7)

And to my old friend, Bill McGann, my compliments for one of the smoothest jobs of direction I have seen in a long time. After all, no matter how promising the elements composing a production, the director can make or break a picture by his manner of blending them. Alcatraz is the finest class B production I, at the moment, can recall having seen this year, and to Bill must go the credit for putting me in that frame of mind. Alcatraz is now making a tour of the neighborhood houses; if you missed its first showing, see it and enjoy one of the thoroughly enjoyable hours which are becoming rarer in our picture theatres.

AMUSING LIGHT COMEDY . . .

● BEG. BORROW OR STEAL: MGM: producer, Frederick Stephani; director, William Thiele; story, William C. White; screen play, Leonard Lee, Harry Ruskin and Marion Parsonnet; photographer, William Daniels, music score, Dr. William Axt; film editor, Conrad A. Nedvig; assistant director, Marvin Stuart. Cast: Frank Morgan, Florence Rice, John Beal, Janet Beecher, Herman Bing, Erik Rhodes, George Givot, E. E. Clive, Tom Rutherford, Cora Witherspoon, Reginald Denny, Vladimir Sokoloff, Harlan Briggs.

NICE little picture. Entertaining story, more of the attractive Cedric Gibbons sets, well directed and well acted, Beg, Borrow or Steal will make you satisfied with the seventy-two minutes you spend in viewing it. It is a comedy of situations, one which lent itself to more purely cinematic treatment than was accorded it. Leonard Lee, Harry Ruskin and Marion Parsonnet gave it intelligent, briskly moving and logical progression in their screen play; provided it with dialogue which in places sparkles with witty lines, consequently they are to be credited with doing a good job of the sort the producers are demanding even though the box-office shows the public is getting tired of having to listen to so much gab. Here is a story which could have been told to much better effect if at least two-thirds of the speeches had been eliminated and Lee and his associates had been allowed to write it for the camera. However, as much can be said of practically all the talkies we are getting, so the only matter which concerns us now is how the picture measures up as it is presented, not as how it might have been presented. America is the locale of the opening sequence, then the story hops to Monte Carlo, where we meet a group of most engaging bunko men who can give only one eye to their business as they have to keep the other on the police. Cast as well as the group is, it gave Director William Thiele an opportunity to display his skill in manufacturing laugh-provoking comedy.

Romance Is Presented Well . . .

A NOTABLE feature of the screen play is its treatment of the romance shared by Florence Rice and John Beal. Generally in a picture of the sort, the comedy is permitted to spread over the romance and to cheapen it by efforts to make it as amusing as the rest of the story. Lee and his collaborators treat their

romance with regard for its tenderness and emotional values; they define it sharply, keeping its edges from being fringed by the overlapping of the comedy which surrounds it and giving Thiele an opportunity to present it with all its romantic values intact. He was fortunate in having such a responsive heroine as Florence Rice, a girl who with every appearance displays marked progress towards the achievement of widespread popularity. She has most expressive eyes, a fine talking voice, and reveals latent emotional power which hints at her development into an outstanding screen actress. Frank Morgan heads the cast and gives one of the most impressive performances of his career. E. E. Clive is superb as a befuddled member of the British aristocracy, his performance being one which English people themselves will relish when the picture is shown over there. Since first seeing Clive on the screen it has been my opinion that our producers are not making full use of his great ability as a comedian. He has all the qualifications for stardom in stories which provide him with serious as well as amusing moments.

Strong Supporting Cast . . .

THE value of a well balanced supporting cast is demonstrated once more. Beal is amusing in his light scenes and sincerely portrays the lover in his share of the romance. Herman Bing, Erik Rhodes, George Givot and Reg Denny, accomplished comedians all of them, make a joyous group of gentlemanly crooks ever on the lookout for victims. It is the first time I have seen Givot on the screen. He seems to have everything it takes. A sweet note in the picture is the fine characterization of Janet Beecher as Florence's mother and the patient wife of Morgan. I never have seen Miss Beecher give anything but a thoroughly convincing performance. One thing the picture-goer can anticipate without fear of being disappointed when he sees a picture bearing the Metro label, is a complete and pictorially impressive production. The genius of Cedric Gibbons is reflected in all the studio's product. Beg, Borrow or Steal is mounted handsomely and photographed with artistic effect, William Daniels being the man who was behind the camera. The only defect in the picture is its failure to make the most of the moment when Frank Morgan learns that Clive really is the nobleman Morgan thought he was pretending to be. It falls flat. It could have been given comedy value if Morgan had overheard a servant addressing Clive in a manner which convinced Morgan the title was genuine, fol-

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lowed by blundering attempts on Morgan's part to square himself. As we have it, Clive merely states that he really has a title and Morgan believes him, although up to the closing sequence he had refused to believe it.

BUCK JONES ROUNDS US UP ...

● HEADIN' EAST: Columbia; producer, L. G. Leonard; director, Ewing Scott; screen play, Ethel La Blanche; original story, Joseph Hoffman and Monroe Shaff; photographer, Allen Q. Thompson; film editor, Robert Crandall; art director, Lewis J. Rachmil; assistant director, John Coonan. Cast: Buck Jones, Ruth Coleman, Shemp Howard, Donald Douglas, Elaine Arden, Earl Hodgins, John Elliott, Stan Blystone, Harry Lash, Frank Faylen, Dick Rich, Al Herman.

PUT me down as a Buck Jones fan. I never have seen him in the flesh and have seen him but once on the screen, but the once was enough to convince me that in his make-up he has the things we like in a man. He is a big fellow, handsome, graceful in his movements as a cat, a voice which sounds as if he were a man a fellow could trust, and as light in a saddle as his shadow would be-all things which typify the western hero as the screen has created him, the only type of screen hero who has maintained his individuality and drawing power throughout the history-to-date of the motion picture. The Spectator always has contended that Westerns should be the biggest and best pictures Hollywood scatters throughout the world, and still thinks the big producing companies overlooked a good bet when they left their making to smaller producers who fashioned them only for the smaller houses and made them pretty much alike. The I-Told-You-So department of the Spectator never has been particularly inactive, but it has not been active enough to keep abreast of the predictions listed in the notes of things to write about and later to be included in the I-told-you-so's. For instance, months ago I read that a producer was sending his Western star to make a picture in Hawaii, I made a note: "Cowboy in Hawaii: carry West to big cities," but I never got around to writing it. Now I find that L. G. Leonard, the guiding genius of Coronet Pictures, has beaten me to it.

Purely Psychological Western . . .

TEADIN' EAST opens in the West, then heads The East and stays there until the final fade-out, but never loses its Western flavor. Buck_Jones is too much the Westerner to become an Easterner even when he treads the sidewalks of New York; too much the outdoors man to suggest the indoors even when sitting in the office of a New York business man. He does what I was going to suggest Hollywood should do with its Western stars; he carries the West to a big city. Despite its locale, Headin' East is a Western, a purely psychological Western, but still a Western, with the spirit of the West running through its veins. It was inevitable that Westerns would have to seek new locales; they were exhausting the possibilities of our natural settings, becoming too standardized in their use of them until all the films looked as if they were pressed in the same mold. Leonard saw this, acted accordingly, and gives us in *Headin' East* a bang-up piece of screen entertainment without a single pistol shot in it. But there is enough action in it to make a respectable showing if scattered over several square miles of Western scenery. Inspired by the lettuce war in the Salinas district last winter, the story hops to the produce market in New York and there runs its tumultuous course to a peaceful and romantic ending.

Is Given Fine Direction . . .

UR biggest producers would do well to take a look at this Coronet picture and learn what can be done on a small budget and a brief shooting schedule. They will find the production lacks nothing in scope or impressiveness, and certainly it lacks nothing in direction or acting. Joseph Hoffman and Monroe Shaff provided an original story which Ethel La Blanche made into a screen play. Except for its disposition to talk too much, the writing end reveals good workmanship when brought to life by Ewing Scott's direction. With the budget and shooting time in mind, I was prepared to make allowances for the direction, but I found I was not called upon to do so. In fact, rarely do we find a picture directed so well. As I viewed it, I wondered what any one of our top-notch directors would have done with as little money and time. Neither economy nor speed was suggested by what the screen showed; the story moves along smoothly and swiftly, the players are easy in their roles and do not remind us they are actors playing parts. Buck Jones earns and retains the sympathy of the audience, giving a natural and likable performance. But he is not the whole show. Ruth Coleman proves a most engaging young person as the girl who shares the romance with Buck, and Elaine Arden reveals herself as a comedienne who ranks with the best who appear in the major pictures. The same thing goes for Shemp Howard, one of the cleverest eccentric comedians I have seen in a long time. He and Elaine make a team which would score a triumph in any picture in which they were given an opportunity to reveal their talent. Allen Thompson's photography is excellent, and Film Editor Robert Crandall and Art Director Lewis Rachmil also are to be commended.

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. OPTOMETRIST

1725 North Highland Avenue Hollywood, California HEmpstead 8438

MEET THE HARDYS ...

● YOU'RE ONLY YOUNG ONCE; Metro picture and release; directed by George B. Seitz; features Lewis Stone, Cecilia Parker, Mickey Rooney and Fay Holden; screen play by Kay Van Riper; based on the characters created by Aurania Rouverol; musical score by David Snell; sound by Douglas Shearer; art direction by Cedric Gibbons, Wade Rubottom and Edwin B. Willis; photography by Lester White; film editor, Adrienne Fazan; assistant director, Edward Babille. Cast: Frank Craven, Ann Rutherford, Eleanor Lynn, Ted Pearson, Sara Haden, Charles Judels, Selmer Jackson.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

TETRO has a good bet in this new Hardy family. It is a likeable group and should attract a large following throughout the country, especially in the small towns. The players team well together; their temperaments contrast sufficiently to make for diversity in the group, and yet there is a sympathy of viewpoint, as well as a give-and-take in performing, which creates the impression the players are truly related. Created originally by Aurania Rouverol, noted for her delination of American family life, the characters of the Hardy household have a greater depth than those of most other family pictures which have come to the screen. You're Only Young Once, the screen play of which was penned by Kay Van Riper, centers about the experiences in romance of the young daughter and her adolescent brother while the family is vacationing at Catalina Island, and there are scenes the father has with each of them, in his effort to direct their ideas and conduct and yet not to preach, which are notable for their tenderness and sincerity. Miss Van Riper's writing, however, is at once the greatest asset and the greatest weakness of the picture. Trained in the field of radio drama, she has a pronounced knack for revealing and easy-flowing dialogue, but, far from appreciating the visual factor in motion pictures, it would seem that she regards the camera merely as something you take pictures with. During the first ten minutes of the film there was scarcely a moment's cessation of talk.

Catalina Saves the Day . . .

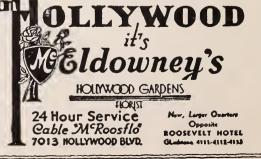
CCHOOLED in Beatonian esthetics, the whole thing was beginning to get on my nerves so, that my teeth were grinding. Other spectators may not have felt quite the same reaction, but it has been my experience in th past, based on investigation, that my reactions are shared in at least a lesser degree and perhaps unconsciously—but shared—by other observers. Fortunately the story shifted its locale to Catalina Island at this stage, and the scenes of motor boats gracefully skimming the water, of gay young bathers, and of the various enchantments of the island, brought relief and a new interest in the characters. Also on the island music is brought into the story, both that which is supposed to come from dance bands and that which is purely background music, ably provided by David Snell. A good deal more of it could have been used to advantage. Probably the temptation is great to lean heavily on dialogue in writing one of these "slice of life" dramas, in which the emphasis is on characterization. In such

a way have they always been written for the stage. But to say the same things in visual terms is Miss Van Riper's problem. Talk is undermining the motion picture industry, and it will certainly dispel patronage from the Hardy family. In my opinion, however, the most eloquent bits in the picture were those in which the camera played the greater part, for example, the shot of Mickey Rooney convulsed and confused and exhilarated by the strange new emotions surging within him when the flirting young Jerry makes up to him.

Characterizations Are Vivid . . .

GEORGE B. SEITZ has done an able job of directing. He knows his people and has gotten them with vividness onto the screen. Lewis Stone, as the wise and forbearing Judge Hardy, appears in perhaps his best part of recent seasons. He plays it, on the whole, with fine sensitiveness. Only occasionally do we perceive some of the tricks of the trade at work. Mickey Rooney had the audience with him all the way. Having watched him grow up on the screen, it took delight in witnessing the first manifestations of the biological impulse stirring in the young felloweven applauded some such manifestations. And Rooney knows his camera, gets the full force of his personality into it. Cecilia Parker is pleasing as the daughter who encounters her first disillusionment at the hands of Cupid, and Fay Holden, the mother, gives a capable performance. Outstanding in the picture is Eleanor Flynn, a very talented miss, who characterizes her jaded young sophisticate in a manner suggestive of Bette Davis. Ted Pearson is competent as the forflushing life-guard who disillusions Cecilia, and he displays an impressive physique. All are expertly preserved on celluloid by Cinematographer Lester White. The Hardy family has a future —if its members do not talk themselves to death.





THEY WILL SIT THROUGH IT ...

● THANK YOU, MR. MOTO; Twentieth Century-Fox; executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; directed by Norman Foster; screen play by Willis Cooper and Norman Foster; based on a story by John P. Marquand; photography, Virgil Miller, A.S.C.; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Albert Hogsett; assistant director, William Eckhardt; film editors, Irene Morra and Nick De Maggio; costumes, Herschel; sound, Joseph E. Aiken and William H. Anderson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin, Cast: Peter Lorre, Thomas Beck, Pauline Frederick, Jayne Regan, Sidney Blackmer, Sig Rumann, John Carradine, William von Brincken, Nedda Harrigan, Philip Ahn, John Bleifer.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

UDIENCES will not object to sitting through A Thank You, Mr. Moto. It is not stimulating fare, but it has several pleasant features which will make of it a satisfactory double-biller. The chief virtue of the film is a rather nice tone, contributed to greatly by the photography of Virgil Miller, whose scenes are always pleasing and sometimes distinguished. He has a fine sense of pattern and spreads across the screen many beautiful contrasts and combinations of light and shade. For most of his best shots, of course, he is indebted to the settings of Bernard Herzbrun and Albert Hogsett. Their interiors are made especially rich because of a discreet choice of oriental trappings. Another factor lending tone is that the picture deals with a cosmopolitan group, productive of some agreeable dialogue, especially that of Mr. Moto, who expresses himself in the most enviable prose. The yarn itself is routine stuff, a not too coherent action story centering about the efforts of sundry characters to get possession of some ancient scroll paintings, which when pieced together, reveal the location of an ancient treasure buried at the tomb of Genghis Khan. Since, for various reasons, we do not become very interested in either the scrolls, the people who have them or want them, or in the supposed buried treasure, there is little suspense engendered. The piece is studed with bits of drama, some scenes of which are excellently acted, but a good deal of the action is of the rough and tumble sort, with Mr. Moto disporting himself with superhuman cleverness.

Direction Is Capable . . .

NORMAN FOSTER has made the best use of his resources in the direction. resources in the direction. His scenes are of a smooth texture, the characters moving with grace and purpose, and he has shown considerable invention in handling the rough and tumble scenes, which are executed with commendable precision. The chief weakness of the production is the whole idea. It was not my intention to exalt Mr. Moto as a character in speaking of his enviable prose. On the contrary, I think him an insipid and unbelievable fellow, and I also opine that if Sol Wurtzel expects Moto to catch on with the American public, as did Charlie Chan, he has placed his chips on the wrong number. It so happens that this is but the second appearance of Lorre I have seen. With the first I was much impressed; I thought his characterization subtle and

touched with brilliance. As Mr. Moto I find his work monotonous, affected, and uninspired. His characterization in this film is under a certain handicap because his motives are concealed from the audience until past the middle of the film, when it is revealed that he is a detective. But until then the audience believes him an insensate murderer and a thief. What purpose the authors believed would be served by this deception I cannot imagine.

One Sequence Too Many . . .

APROPOS of story faults, elimination of the entire first sequence would much improve the film. It should be eliminated or at least trimmed for these reasons: (1) it was confusing (2) the audience laughed at it. Moto is discovered elaborately madeup to resemble a Mongol, apparently smuggling some scroll paintings with a caravan crossing the Gobi Desert. His manner and appearance are unconvincing, in fact rather funny. Since I had not learned the true cunning of the fellow previously, as will be the case with many spectators, I thought myself doomed to watch the antics of this freakish barbarian for an entire picture. During an encampment he murders a thief who has crept into his tent, and then, with the greatest tenseness and stealthiness, begins to dig a hole in the sand to bury the unfortunate, at which the audience laughed - bad for the picture. The story really begins with the arrival of the caravan at Peiping, when Moto is arrested by the custom officials. As for the cast-Pauline Frederick, splendid actress, is wasted on the part of Madame Chung, an artistocratic Chinese dowager, a difficult part and one for which she evidently was not given sufficient time to prepare, nor careful enough direction before the camera. Miss Fredericks turns in a competent stock performance, however. Thomas Beck and Jayne Regan are an engaging young couple, both giving smooth performances. An outstanding scene in the picture is the death of Prince Chung, played by Philip Ahn, which was strangely gripping. Sidney Blackmer, Sig Rumann, and William Von Brincken were well cast. The screen play was adopted by Willis Cooper and Norman Foster from a story by John P. Marquand.

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MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

AST week Editor Beaton discussed the box-office Lyalue of Stage Door, or rather, the reasons for its happy results in that direction. After enumerating some negative points, which, by all rules of the Hollywood game, would put the odds against it, Mr. Beaton answered himself that it got into the right cinematic hands, that "the story is not the matter of first importance to a motion picture. It is the treatment." (The italics are mine.) Mr. Beaton's comment might well be paraphrased and applied to that great potential asset toward cinema box-office returns, the musical score. There is first the musical treatment of a story, i.e., of the story as translated into motion and an arrangement. into motion and speech. Next there is the division of emotional significance between action, dialogue, settings and music; then there is the treatment of music per se, and-last, yet not least-the exploitation treatment accorded that compound factor: music. I speak of it as a compound factor. From an angle of origination, as well as from that of exploitation, there is such an entity as the composer. Music in itself is a compound entity, consisting of ideas and of various instruments; again of instruments and singing voices or voices. There also may be the often disastrous combination of music and sound effects. A really noted American composer, whose prominence neither originates in nor depends on Hollywood, in the course of an interview, interposed quizzically: "Why call it music?" He was quite genuine in his repartee. "Why not make it music?" I retorted. He replied to the effect that even if a composer did all that would be best without stepping beyond the general bounds of cinema music, there still remained danger from more than one source. What will the dubbing department do? What will be cut before, and how much after, the various previews? And, further, what about operators of sound-machines in the diverse theatres, where equipment and acoustics can make or undo music. Mr. Beaton is infinitely right. It is the treatment that counts.

Tale of a Piano . . .

TREATMENT, of course, is a term which covers a multitude of applications, i.e., sins of commission or omission. For instance, a curious example of camera treatment occurred in the Richard Tauber film, made presumably with more hurry than heat in England. The same grand piano was used in four or five different scenes. If I recall correctly, the piano scenes were shot every time in such manner that the player faced the camera more or less squarely. As it happened, the music rack was up each time, although sheet music was not used in each instance. English piano manufacturers are people of very strict taste. They do not fit their pianos very often with the curved and arabesquely carved music rack which serves as an extra talking point to an alive sale person in this country. The music rack was of that ugly, rectangular, yet practical kind which spreads

out wide enough if one uses a mile of music in four-hand playing. That music rack stuck up in four or five scenes, although locations were even geographically widely separated. Moreover it was a piano of well-aged vintage. It should have been put into the British Museum, for judging from the sound it must have served as a bulwark in the Battle of Hastings (1066 A.D.), unless it had arrived already on a Roman Galleon half a thousand years before then.

Hard for Germans to Get . . .

PART from the music rack, the ear-racking sound **A** was unmistakable every time someone tickled the nervous ivories. I am not exaggerating. The film is musically or otherwise not significant. When Tauber sings in German he is almost excellent in tone and tone-production. As so many German tenors, he gives his already ample and beautiful voice an extra dose of pressure or push. Maybe that is what now is called "youmph." It is treacherous vocal treatment. The tenor, of course, can sing very poetically, as in a Schumann Lied, but when he essays a ballad in English he pulls his palate back, perhaps for the reason that the English "th" sound might have been invented by the Beelzebub of phonetics, as far as most German-born are concerned. Tauber is given somewhat to affecting that, in more than one sense, hollow-sounding tone-repression. Or is Miss Dietrich only one accessory to this fad, which might possibly be traced to such crooners as Vallee and Crosby? I find it hard to define, but have noticed it more and more also in recent American screen productions. Is it that phonetic smoke gets into their throats? Fortunately Martha Raye has mellowed the other extreme. In that connection a compliment is due Judy Garland in Thoroughbreds which fills me with more than a slightly evident "raye" of hope for her as a very pleasant voiced song comedienne. Indeed. treatment is a subject as long as it is broad, and it is a long one.

Irene Dunne's Singing . . .

THERE occurs but the very minimum of music in The Awful Truth. However, the little there is pleases in itself and in the manenr of treatment. Musically the cabaret scene means nothing, but it is amusingly obvious of calibre, so that the psychologic and dramatic innuendo is deftly and yet definitely implied. Leo McCarey, who directs this sparkling comedy, has a rare way of employing music. Irene Dunne, altogether excellent in a gay role made doubly attractive by genuine touches of wistfulness, did a bit of equally enjoyable singing. Action-wise Mr. McCarey allows her to warble only a part of an aria, just long enough for Cary Grant to burst into the studio and to upset things. Again there was enough of Miss Dunne's singing to convince that she took her vocal lessons for music's sake, not with an ulterior motive personified by a foppish maestro. Musically as well as dramatically the music was cut off opportunely. It was not done with the usual vocal squeal and discord in the piano accompaniment. Miss Dunne ends a phrase with a musical chuckle. That too is *treatment*.

Music In "The Hurricane" . . .

FRANKLY, I find it difficult to speak about the music in The Hurricane. I would have to hear and see the picture again to write more than the following few lines. One reason is that I have much respect for the talent and skill of Mr. Goldwyn's music chief, Alfred Newman. He has executed big and telling scores. I enjoyed none more than that for The Gay Desperado, and that because of the lifetrue naturalness of the intermezzi of Mexican music. They were neither brilliant, nor too precise of unison attack. They had atmosphere by reason of native nonchalance. Paradoxical as it may read, even a hurricane is nonchalant. Nature at her worst of fury is freakish. I have been in a hurricane on the Atlantic which made one of the biggest ships afloat stand still and arrive a day late. To begin with, as Mr. Beaton has pointed out-the long and impressive overture seems rather wasted, being played before a closed curtain. This is all the more the case for the reason that it was followed by a newsreel, so that whatever atmosphere it engendered in preparation for the film, was dissipated. I liked the use of high, sustained voices in the musical storm suggestion during the title. In the score as a whole Mr. Newman employs much skill. The Hawaiian steel guitars are restrained—thank God for that—and Dorothy Lamour sings nicely. But how I pray that Hollywood may have acquired its sea legs and its fill of "Aloha" music. From Paramount's Souls at Sea to Warner Brothers' submarine affair, and now this production, an awful lot of stormy water has rushed over the scoring stages. The question is still one of treatment: How much noise, how much musical suggestion of raging elements and danger?

Music of "The Robber Symphony" . . .

COMETHING of an answer may be provided, I Danticipate, when The Robber Symphony, "film in music," as the Composer-Director Frederick Feher terms it, is presented December 3 at the Philharmonic Auditorium, as a benefit for the State Commission for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Animals. The film is ninety minutes long, and, I understand, the dialogue contains only 300 words. As Director Fritz Lang has done, so the Composer-Director Feher worked eminently in this, as in other productions, with means of music to suggest action and emotion. In an escape scene, lasting twenty minutes, the criminal is pursued by police and the entire town, but neither police nor citizenry are shown on the screen. By force of musically aroused imagination the public is aware of the pursuers whose very reality is finally intensified when Composer Feher adds two "shofars," or natural-toned horns made from the horns of rams. Feher sees the film as a musical theatre-art, not as a theatrical imitation of

the stage with musical accompaniment. Secondly, he is an avowed believer in the treatment whereby dialogue is eliminated unless necessary, action and emotions being implied by music, and left to the imagination. This results in "unlimited expression," because its extent is left to a by no means unimaginative public. Feher's music is relatively simple. His conductor's score, however, is unique. A special staff is given to marks indicating the "rhythm of camera motion." These signs resemble notations usually employed to guide percussion instruments. Feher relates "camera rhythm" (action rhythm), to the orchestral rhythm. He believes in what he called "acoustic vision based on tone possibilities not sufficiently realized generally." Evidently this Viennese artist has applied the Wagnerian theory of unity between music, drama and stage, also to the film. This should do away with those senseless repetitions of musical figures or drastic cuts which occur on most scoring stages, because the visual part of the sound film still remains a Procrustean bed for screen music. If the latter proves too long, head or feet are chopped off at the will of the picture director. If it be too short, it is stretched and distented without regard for its best musicality. But that, unfortunately, is treatment which does not count well in the art of the sound film.

ENDORSES SPECTATOR'S VIEWS

FROM New York comes this interesting letter written to the Spectator editor by Mark Swan: "I was delighted, when reading your magazine, to note your attitude regarding talkies. It is refreshing to me to find my viewpoint advanced, after many hopeless years, by a man in your position. May I say I write with a certain amount of knowledge of the situation as I have had all, or part, of thirty Broadway plays and I have done the scripts of three hundred 'silents'? Also may I say that having free entree to almost any play in town, the silents attracted me so strongly that I spent my evening in the movies for years? The silents were an art. A separate and distinct art: not a raucous imitation of something better. 'Seeing is believing'-the eye is more powerful than the ear. The beholder could improvise his own dialogue. The silents usually had beauty and, above all, they had pace, speed. What happened when the moguls put in dialogue? The pictures slowed down; they lost their speed. They became a mechanical imitation of the stage instead of a distinct art form. Watching a picture in silent days, I surrendered to the illusion. Who can surrender to the illusion of a photograph talking? I am only one, but I do not go to the talkies. My two or three hundred a year may mean nothing, but I cannot be the only one. When enough of us stay away the moguls may realize what they have thrown away and what they have in its place. More power to you in your propaganda: 'Use dialogue only when absolutely necessary to convey thought where action cannot convey it.'

"Beg, Borrow or Steal"

*Screenplay by

Leonard Lee

Current Assignment
"THE GREAT CANADIAN"

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

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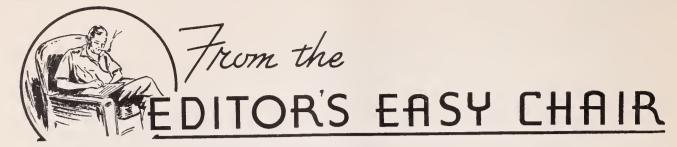
Vol. 12-No. 26

We Pledge Services of One Million
People to Draw the Attention of the
World to an Anti-War Picture if
Hollywood Has One Producer Who Is
Wise Enough to See that by Serving
The Cause of Peace He Can Benefit
Mankind and Gain Enormous Profit.

... REVIEWS ...

MAN PROOF ★ YOU'RE A SWEETHEART ★ SERGEANT MURPHY
SHE'S GOT EVERYTHING ★ PRESCRIPTION FOR ROMANCE

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ONE MILLION SUPPORTERS READY . . .

INHEN, for the Spectator of November 6, I wrote a plea for Charlie Chaplin to make an anti-war picture, and published the letter of Mary Born (Columbus, Ohio) which had inspired my remarks, I did not anticipate such a show of nationwide interest as has been aroused. Peace unquestionably is the biggest thing in the public mind today. I knew that when I wrote my peace plea, knew it one year ago when I wrote a personal letter to the head of each of the major studios urging him to make an anti-war picture, which, I promised him, not only would be a great public service, but would prove a great financial success by virtue of the exploitation it would receive from both organized and unorganized lovers of peace. At that time, and prior to the appearance of the Spectator of November 6, I was writing more or less abstractly, convinced that such support would be given a peace picture, but being unaware of the degree in which the support was organized. Now the Spectator is in a position to offer Chaplin, or any other producer with public spirit enough to serve the public by producing a picture demonstrating the folly of war, a united force of one million people to exploit the picture and make it the most profitable undertaking in the history of film production. What Hollywood shows a reluctance to do for peace, perhaps it will do for profit.

Great Organizations Back It . . .

EXTRAORDINARY has been the response to Miss Born's letter and the Spectator's comments on it. For instance, take the National Council for the Prevention of War, with headquarters in Washington, D.C. For sixteen years it has battled for peace, working in close harmony with thirty participating and co-operating national organizations whose united memberships alone would form, and could enroll, the million exploiters I offer the producer of an anti-war picture. An idea of the scope of the activities of the National Council can be gleaned from these figures for 1936, the latest compilation I have seen: It distributed 1,316,688 pieces of literature in that year; its staff members delivered 2,187 speeches in thirtynine states and the District of Columbia; a constant stream of anti-war facts and material went to all forty-eight states and twenty-four foreign countries. These figures reflect the force the National Council could exert to bring an anti-war picture to the attention of the world. Last month the Motion Picture Department of the National Council gave nationwide distribution to a bulletin from which I quote a paragraph: "Both those inside the industry and those on the outside who read Mr. Beaton's Hollywood Spectator place great confidence in his critical analyses of motion picture plays and his unbiased editorial comment. His splendid publication is devoted to practical film criticism. When he says the industry would profit from making an anti-war movie, he is doing so because he thinks the subject would lend itself to a film possessing great mass appeal. The accuracy of his judgment of what is a good movie from commercial and artistic standards is proven by studying his reviews published during the past decade. By Welford Beaton's suggestion that Hollywood make an anti-war film and by his endorsement of Miss Born's plea to Chaplin, a challenge has been issued to the film industry and to a universally loved film character-an idea the public would do well to take up and push forward to fulfillment."

Veterans Give Strong Support . . .

NOTHER great organization, the Veterans of A Foreign Wars of the United States, is working earnestly for the promotion of peace. Barney Yanofsky, editor of Foreign Service, the organization's magazine, writes me a letter which you will find on page six, this Spectator. On behalf of the National Council of Women's Work, Mrs. E. C. Bixler, New Windsor, Maryland, chairman of the committee on peace, writes: "I certainly agree with you that the world will pack the movie houses if a great peace film is given them, especially if their beloved Charlie Chaplin is the leading character. I know, from moving in and out among the people, high and low, rich and poor, colored and white, that the world is sick and tired of war and they want no more of it. A really great peace film showing the real way of life in our interdependent world, will make a powerful appeal and be a great money-maker for the producers. I'm very fond of really good movies and do all I can to support them. They have a great place in our life, but I have no time nor money for ordinary shows. Thank you for your part, and your splendid publication's. With your influence I look forward to seeing

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Charlie Chaplin in a great anti-war film. There is nothing in all the world that all the people in the world want so much as peace."

Fifteen Thousand Approve . . .

MILO HINCKLE, executive secretary of the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends writes from Richmond, Indiana, as follows: "Out of a deep devotion to the cause of peace and opposition to the waste and insanity of war, I have been deeply moved by your fine editorial commendation of the appeal of Miss Mary Born to the movie producers, and especially to Mr. Chaplin, to produce a high grade, genuine peace movie. I believe that the better class of thinking Americans approve heartily your expression and want to see this thing done at this time especially. My line of commendation to you comes not alone from myself, but as representing the above Yearly Meeting of Friends, more than 15,000 members, who express their wish through my line to you." The National Council of Jewish Women, St. Louis Section, sends me a copy of a letter written by Mrs. Joseph Glaser, Jr., on behalf of the organization, to Charlie Chaplin: "My dear Mr. Chaplin: It has been brought to our attention through an article in the Hollywood Spectator that you are considering the production of a film which would play up the misery of war instead of the glory of war. As a representative of an organization of over eight hundred women, may I tell you that we consider it a very important step that you should have this under consideration and hope you will find it possible to carry out this excellent idea. I believe it would have a tremendous popular appeal just at this time when the newsreels are so filled with the destruction going on abroad."

Individuals Do Their Share . . .

FROM the growing pile of letters from individuals I make some selections at random. Writes Richard W. Buckingham, Hemstead, New York: "Your suggestion of the November 6 issue of the Hollywood Spectator, that Charlie Chaplin make an anti-war picture is an excellent one! Thanks to you and Miss Born for placing so concrete a suggestion for peace action before the public and before Hollywood. May Charlie Chaplin have the good sense to see eye to eye with you. If he does not, immediately, may you have the spunk to keep reminding him and Hollywood generally that such a picture is sorely needed in this time of war drums and war pictures. Thank you again for an excellent editorial." Mrs. Lu Anna Wilson, Guilderland, New York: "I heartily agree with the thought expressed in both the editorial and letter. I feel that at this time we need to have our attention turned from the glorification of war and toward something which will lead us to do all in our power to end all wars." From Margaret Willis, Assistant Professor of Social Science Education, Ohio State University, Columbus: "The suggestion that Charlie Chaplin should make an anti-war picture is one of the best I have heard recently. I wish you all

success in your efforts to bring this about." A copy of another of the shower of letters descending on the Chaplin studio: "Dear Mr. Chaplin: May I second the suggestion of Welford Beaton in the Hollywood Spectator that you take the initiative in writing and acting in a great anti-war play which shall express the felt helplessness and antagonism of the common people against the martial juggernaut? You are one of the few with ability, resources, and independence capable of doing this service for mankind. Your country needs you!-Robert B. Pettengill, Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Southern California."

Opportunity Open to All . . .

CROM all parts of the country they come, the majority backing the Chaplin idea, all of them backing the peace picture idea, no matter who makes it. "If we can't smoke Chaplin out," writes Horton W. Ashley, Milwaukee, "how about any one of the scores of favorites whose name would give prestige to such a picture?" From Alice E. Burrows, Plain-field, New Jersey: "But don't you think Mr. Chaplin is too identified with comedy to be the right man for such a grave and serious picture? By all means let us have it, even with him, but I would rather see Paul Muni in it." Rufus Stevens, Buffalo, New York, picks Spencer Tracy: "After seeing him in Captains Courageous I am more than ever convinced that he could stir up more sympathy as the poor victim of the horrors of war than anyone else you have in Hollywood." An interesting view is expressed by John R. Phillips, New Orleans: "Children are the chief victims of war. They suffer during it by loss of parents or other relatives, and when they grow up they have to pay for it. Your picture should revolve around a boy-little Bartholomew or Mickey Rooney." From Winnipeg, Canada, we get an international view, Richard Malsby writing: "It would be a picture for the whole world. . . . Women bear all the grief war causes, all the tragedy of it. Instead of Chaplin, or any other man, give us one of your great actresses to represent all women." Mr. Malsby's suggestion is worth considering. The more I think of it, the more I like it. But the above extracts from letters-I could have gone on endlesslybring to our attention that the field is open to all producers. Which one of them would like to have one million people working for him, without cost, to make a picture of his a box-office success?

POOR LITTLE SPECTATOR! . . .

THE film industry's campaign to put an end to I radio broadcasting of unsavory gossip about screen people, has become funny. Weeks before any other paper made reference to it, the Spectator several times urged its suppression and pointed out the harm it was doing. Then Daily Variety discovered it just as producing organizations were about to do something about it, and gracefully took the bows when something finally was done. A little later the Los Angeles Examiner kidnapped the whole thing, whooped

it up with interviews and whatnot, and put Variety into eclipse. And up to date the Spectator is the only paper which, by analyzing their harmful effect, has presented a real reason why the nasty gossip purveyors should be driven off the air.

GIVING MEMORY A CHANCE . . .

WHICH picture is the best of those shown during the present year? Obviously a ridiculous question. To you there are two best pictures—the one you liked best and the one which made the most money; to me, the one liked best and the one which took in the most money. The trouble is, however, there is none I liked best. I liked The Good Earth and The Awful Truth. Now, which of those would you say is the better picture? Would you say roast beef is better than strawberries and cream? When Freddie, the spaniel, and I this morning were on our before-breakfast walk along country roads in San Fernando Valley, I planned my day's work to include my perusal of this year's Spectator reviews of pictures to refresh my memory and to equip me to pass judgment on them—to pick the Spectator's best picture, best performance by a star, by a supporting player, and whatnot. The selections were not to be announced until the beginning of the year, but I wanted to get an early start and prepare myself to do a good job of it. I still intend to make out the list for publication in the first Spectator in January, but as yet I have not turned the pages of even one of this year's issues to date. They are on the couch across the room, where I placed them before breakfast, and I am in my easy chair, breakfast attended to, pad on knee, elbow on the chair's arm, pipe in mouth, and giving memory a chance to select its best pictures before I refresh it by perusal of the reviews I have written.

Roast Beef and Strawberries

FTER all, your best picture of the year must be A the one which stands out most prominently in your memory among those you have seen. But there, again, are we up against roast beef and strawberries and cream. Two of those I recall most vividly are among the year's poorest performers at the box-office, Night Must Fall and Make Way for Tomorrow. I have seen a great many during the year and at the moment cannot recall a dozen whose merits set them apart from the others, so if these two stand out among the few, they must at least conform to my conception of best pictures. Then there is the consideration of personal preference. Perhaps you saw both the unsuccessful pictures and did not like either of them. Who am I, then, to tell you they are among the year's best? You have your own preferences. But even if we agree, on what basis can we argue that The Good Earth is better than The Awful Truth? Each realized all its values, each hit the mark it aimed at. But so did Night Must Fall and Make Way for Tomorrow, and all four differed radically. And what of Wells Fargo, Tovarich, Conquest, 100

Men and a Girl and whichever of the music-dance pictures you thought best? How are we going to compare them? You see, we cannot get away from roast beef and strawberries. And, again, the best picture to you may be the one you saw most recently, as it is the one you remember most vividly.

On a Business Basis . . .

LL motion pictures are articles of commerce, aim-All motion pictures are articles of commerce, and at a definite market. They are produced to make money, therefore the one which makes the most must be the best because it was the most successful in hitting the mark all of them aimed at. But upon what basis are we to compute profits? On gross returns or returns per dollar of production cost? The latter, if we are thinking in terms of business, and that gets us more muddled than ever in our search for the best picture. Bryan Foy made one for Warner Brothers, Alcatraz, which cost little money and has done big business. It would not surprise me to learn, if one could get the figures when all the returns are in, that this class B production outdistanced all others in profit per dollar of cost. And that would make it the best picture of the year. If we do our judging on the basis of adherence to the demands of screen art, of perfection attained in making a motion picture, we find ourselves farther than ever up in the air. I cannot recall having seen a motion picture during the year. Finally when I have waded back through all my reviews, I may locate one which more nearly conforms to cinematic principles than any of the others, and that would have to be the one to head my list, even though when I saw it it may have bored me by its demonstration of ineptitude on the part of its makers in their application of cinematic principles when they filmed their story. So -all you can do is to pick your own best, and all I can do is to pick mine. I happen to have a paper in which I can make mine public, but that does not entitle them to any more consideration than yours should receive.

Best Performances of Year . . .

MUCH the same must be our approach to our selection of the best performances of the year. If you did not enjoy Bob Montgomery's performance in Night Must Fall, I cannot make you enjoy it in retrospect by naming it as the best of the year by a featured player, leading man or star. Having moved out to the lawn where I continue my rambling thoughts in my outdoor easy chair, I am farther than ever from the pile of Spectators, and find that without them to refer to I can recall precious few other performances entitled to consideration as being among the best of the year. That is because I have seen hundreds of characterizations which were practically perfect. I select Montgomery, among the men, because I remember his performance most vividly. It was an amazing study of a young man with a murder complex, and if I had but one award to make, I would name Bob for it. But as I write I see again Spencer Tracy strumming strings in Captains Courageous and talking to Freddie Bartholomew; I see Paul Muni as Emil Zola, and Cary Grant wearing a too-big hat in The Awful Truth, and Boyer playing Napoleon, Victor Moore in Make Way for Tomorrow, and-well, a few score more whose performances were flawless. Among the women, for diversity of characterizations and brilliance in their performance, I would place the wreath on the brow of the amazingly clever Carole Lombard, who last year should have received the Academy award for her work in My Man Godfrey. And Claudette Colbert in Tovarich. Who could give a better performance than hers? . . . This whole picking-the-best business I find quite confusing. In the first Spectator of 1938 I hope to be more coherent. I might go on and on now, but it is getting too hot out here in the sun and I'm going to knock off writing for the morning. Anyway, I have something far more important to attend to. From where I am sitting I can see the birds have splashed all the water out of their bath and on the table where I scatter their food they haven't a blessed thing to eat. Remedying such conditions comes under the heading of most urgent business.

WASTE OF ACTING TALENT . . .

BECAUSE he is one of the most brilliant actors on the American stage and an ideal type for the screen, Burgess Meredith is brought to Hollywood to appear in pictures. And RKO teams him with the clever and engaging Ann Sothern in a production which was offered locally as the unimportant end of a double bill. In deliberately classifying as unimportant this important actor, RKO is making it difficult for itself ultimately to cash in on his possibilities.

SCREEN HELPS ITS COMPETITOR ...

AST week's Warner Brothers' radio broadcast, the first of their widely exploited series, was undistinguished—just another of the sort which the public is receiving with such a little display of interest that it already is reported that Metro is going off the air without completing its contract. Warners presented scenes from It's Love I'm After, a picture which still is to be shown in thousands of houses. After hearing the broadcast. I can not imagine why anyone should desire to see the picture, as the abbreviated screen version did not even hint at the entertainment quality of the whole production. That the competition of radio is in part responsible for the poor showing film theatre box-offices have been making for the past few months, is a fact no one disputes, yet we are presented with the queer spectacle of the motion picture industry lending all the support it can to its powerful competitor. The last Metro broadcast I listened to certainly did nothing to dignify the great organization it represented. I think it would make the casual listener conclude that if the company could not do better on the screen than it did on the air, its pictures scarcely would be worth seeing.

Publicity Departments At Fault...

THE whole idea of the air appearances of film performers is fundamentally unsound. Nothing else has harmed the industry more than the nature of its effort to benefit itself by publicity. It has learned nothing from the fact that its most widely exploited woman, Greta Garbo, is the one who has shunned publicity most, a policy which has sustained her prominence even in the face of her studio's extraordinary stupidity in giving her what publicity it could manufacture without her co-operation. I refer particularly to "Garbo Loves Taylor," a display of bad taste and worse business judgement which today probably makes Metro people blush when they think of it. As the industry's business is one of selling shadows to the public, one would think it would appreciate the wisdom of keeping its players, as individuals, as much in the shadows as possible. Certainly their voices should come to the public only from the screen. That is not the view of the studios. About the time of the release of a picture in which Jane Doe plays a serious, cultured part of dramatic strength, we hear her on the air exchanging cheap wisecracks with a radio announcer. The ways of publicity departments certainly are incomprehensible, their utter lack of common sense amazing.

We Suppose About Marjorie...

THE box-office reflects the public's interest in a star, I therefore it is desirable to create the interest. That means exploitation. Marjorie Weaver, a young player, appeared in a Century picture and revealed enough talent to warrant the prediction that she is on the way to stardom. In persuance of its method of making a star, the Century publicity department will back up her screen appearances by providing the press with all the information about her it can discover and invent; we will be told whether she toes in, votes Republican or likes pickled herrings. She will go on the air and speak silly lines. And when by sheer force of her personality and talent she becomes a successful star, in spite of the nature of the publicity given her, Harry Brand will shake hands with Milt Howe and each will congratulate the other on the brilliant results achieved by their publicity department. Now let us suppose they had gone after her publicity in a directly opposite manner—by refusing absolutely to give the public one scrap of information about her, not even her name. Say this is what happens: In her first picture Marjorie's name is not included in the credit list. She interests the public. Who is she? Oh, says the studio, just some little girl on the lot; can't recall her name. She appears, again anonymously, in support of a big star. This time it will be, who is she? But no one seems to know, not even any one on the lot. Her third appearance. WHO IS SHE? Still no one knows her name, where she comes from, where she lives or anything else about her. By this time I am afraid Marjorie would be wilting under the strain of dodging the newsreel cameramen, the men of every wire service, of every illustrated paper, of every

broadcasting company, of the hundreds of journalists told to go to Hollywood, find out who the girl is or don't come back. If Marjorie could stand it, she would find herself the most widely exploited woman in the whole world, and this time Harry and Milt would be justified in having an extra handshake.

FOREIGN VETERANS FOR PEACE

DEAR MR. BEATON:
Permit me to add my hearty endorsement to the clamor for an anti-war picture with Charlie Chaplin in the leading role. I only wish that I possessed the genius and the talent to produce a satire that would do to war, and those who promote wars, what George M. Cohan's I'd Rather Be Right is doing to the politicians. Charlie Chaplin would play the leading role and the satire would be pointed directly at the munitions makers, the international diplomats, the politicians, the "stuffed shirt" dictators, the moguls of finance who want police protection for their properties abroad, and the gamblers in international bonds and credits. The people would laugh, but under those laughs would be exposed the bitter realization of the folly and the futility of wars in general, and how human lives are mere pawns in the economic war games.

World In Right Mood . . .

NLY Chaplin could produce a picture that would accomplish these objectives. The world today is in a mood to take this message seriously. Charlie Chaplin has it within his power to create a powerful safeguard against momentary hysteria, the kind that can suddenly sweep a nation into war, by lampooning the war mongers with subtle satire in a manner that exposes their stupid maneuvers to public gaze. That the time is ripe for the development of this thought is beyond question. In the campaign to "Keep America Out of War," being promoted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, we are witnessing the unusual spectacle of a group of overseas veterans of the World War assuming the leadership in the fight against war in the future. Just a few years ago, veteran organizations were content merely to plead for an adequate national defense as a guarante for peace. Today, America's largest organized group of overseas veterans is making a militant fight for peace, with demands for the de-profitizing of war, the control of munitions, and thumbs-down on all foreign entanglements which obligate the use of our military forces. If Charlie Chaplin will lend his genius to the support of these principles, this message will be brought home to the great mass of the American people—those who will have to do the fighting in the next war and in whose hands rests the power to keep America out of war.-Barney Yanofsy, Editor, Foreign Service, published by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

• MAN-PROOF; MGM; producer, Louis D. Lighton; director, Richard Thorpe; story, Fanny Heaslip Lea; screen play, Vincent Lawrence, Waldemar Young and George Oppenheimer; photographer, Karl Freund; music score, Franz Waxman; montage, John Hoffman; film editor, George Boemler; assistant director, Edward Woehler. Cast: Myrna Loy, Franchot Tone, Rosalind Russell, Walter Pidgeon, Rita Johnson, Nana Bryant, Ruth Hussey, Leonard Penn, John Miljan, William Stack, Oscar O'Shea, Dan Toby.

SMART AND NICE LOOKING . . .

A SMART, sophisticated comedy, directed smooth-ly, acted intelligently and mounted with Cedric Gibbons' usual grasp of the pictorial possibilities of a script and the part sets can play in developing and sustaining a picture's mood. The story of Man Proof deals with Myrna Loy's being in love with love. She loves Walter Pidgeon before he marries Rosalind Russell and continues to love him after that and right up to the time of her discovery that she does not love him and her amazement when she discovers she loves Franchot Tone. Superficially the production is done excellently. Myrna and Rosalind do full justice to the artisically stunning gowns designed by Dolly Tree, a young woman whose creations appeal even to masculine eyes; Karl Freund's photography is of that superlative quality which distinguishes all his camera work, two portraits of Pidgeon being particularly impressive treatments of light and shade; the dialogue is crisp and intelligent, an important feature, as the screen play is composed almost entirely of it; Richard Thorpe's direction is, on the whole, a creditable job, becoming conventional only when he shows Tone keeping his hat on during a visit to Myrna's apartment. However, as Tone is a newspaper artist, that lapse can be defended on the ground that on the screen all newspapermen keep their hats on when visiting women friends. I do not wear a hat myself, but if some film director will invite me to his home, I will take one along with me and wear it while dinning, thus demonstrating my respect for directional conventions.

Without Emotional Appeal . . .

THE weakness of Man Proof is that it is an unemo-I tional, abstract discussion of the state of being in love, a cold and brittle treatment which uses players as chess players use their symbols; which appeals only to our intellects and leaves our emotions untouched. At no spot in the production do we care what happens to whom. Any motion picture attains its objective as entertainment only in the degree in which it arouses our desire to see a given end attained. The story of Man Proof revolves around Myrna Loy, and the picture, to be successful in satisfying us, must engage our sympathy for her and make us wish to see her wishes gratified. In an early sequence in which we might have learned something about her inner reaction to Pidgeon's marriage to another girl, Myrna is drunk, consequently her actions and spoken sentiments can be attributed to alcohol and not to her true feelings. She

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does the drunk scenes capably, but they are a waste of footage in as far as they convey to us anything of story value. What we wish to see is the reaction of a sober girl to her loss of the man she thinks she loves. For once we find Myrna cast in a part whose emotional depths are beyond her reach. A Carole Lombard would have brought the character to life. Myrna makes its surface glitter, but never gets inside it. We admire her mechanics, but give no emotional response to either her joys or sorrows, consequently, as she is the leading character, the picture as a whole has only mild appeal.

Rest of Cast Capable . . .

WITHIN Myrna's clearly defined limitations all the other performers are kept, as they have signifionly in respect to their effect on the desires and ambitions of the leading character. As we are not interested in them, it is difficult to arouse our interest in anything affecting them. As performers, however, the work of other members of the cast merits only praise. Rosalind Russell proves ideal casting for the part she plays, an understanding, self sacrificing girl who earns all the sympathy the picture manages to arouse. Tone and Pidgeon are in every way satisfactory. A beautiful performance is that of Nana Bryant as Myrna's mother. We get a couple of glimpses of that excellent actor, John Miljan, one of the many capable players Hollywood has been overlooking while scanning foreign markets for new talent. Cedric Gibbons and his associates are to be commended, not only for the imposing appearance of their main sets, but also for giving us perhaps the most true-to-life interior of a newspaper office I have seen on the screen. Too bad Thorpe's newspaperman did not reflect the same degree of authenticity. Louis Lighton, producer of Man Proof, is to be commended for giving us one of the smartest looking pictures of the season. In a mild sort of way it will give satisfaction to those who still have a taste for screen entertainment composed almost entirely of dialogue delivered against visually alluring backgrounds by people who wear nice clothes nicely.

RADIO'S EFFECT ON THE SCREEN . . .

● YOU'RE A SWEETHEART; Universal picture and release; produced by B. G. DeSylva; stars Alice Faye; directed by David Butler; features George Murphy, Ken Murray, Oswald, Charles Winninger, Andy Devine, William Gargan, Frank Jenks, Frances Hunt, Casper Reardon; screen play by Monte Brice and Charles Grayson; original story by Warren Wilson, Maxwell Shane and William Thomas; photography, George H. Robinson; art director, Jack Otterson; associate art director, Richard H. Riedel; film editor, Bernard W. Burton; musical director, Charles Previn; dances staged by Carl Randall; vocal supervision, Charles E. Henderson; orchestrations, Frank Skinner; sound, Joseph Lapis and Bernard B. Brown; songs by Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson, Charles Tobias and Murray Mencher, Lou Bring, Mickey Bloom and Arthur Quenzer. Supporting cast: Donald Meek, David Oliver, Andrew H. Trimble, Edna Sedgwick, Bob Murphy, Renie Riano, Bobby Watson, The Four Playboys, Maida and Ray, The Norvelle Brothers.

VE GET so much singing on the radio that I believe picture producers eventually will see the wisdom of reducing the number of vocal solos and featuring more prominently the visual quality of their productions, the one department in which radio offers no competition. Ensemble singing always will be in demand in picture houses as it is possible to enhance its musical values with visual trimmings. I like Alice Faye's voice and the feeling she registers in her use of it, but when she occupied the screen alone, I felt I was being cheated of the pictorial treat a wider camera would have provided. However, I enjoyed the picture as a whole, and that is what counts. Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson are chiefly responsible for the musical numbers. Their contributions are outstanding, one number being really brilliant. It is a startling innovation, the setting to music of a trial for murder, listed on the program as Who Killed Maggie? It is delightful nonsense, judge, attorneys and witnesses chanting all their lines. Charles Tobias and Murray Mencher contribute another outstanding number, Scraping the Toast, Alice Faye and George Murphy giving it sparkling interpretation. Lou Bring, Mickey, Bloom and Arthur Quenzer joined forces in completing the musical program with their alluring So It's Love. A great share of credit for the popularity the picture will attain is due Charles Previn for the skill displayed in the direction of the music.

Whole Cast Satisfactory . . .

LICE FAYE makes an appealing heroine. There A is a wholesome, honest quality in her personality which makes her one of my favorites, quite apart from the pleasure her singing gives me. And George Murphy is another of my favorites. He has everything, good looks, acting ability, a pleasant singing voice and amazing grace as a dancer. The public could stand a great deal more of him than producers seem inclined to give it. Ken Murray, around whom the story revolves chiefly, brings his stage voice to the screen, reading his lines to project them to a distant audience and without regard for the fact that voice projection is not a factor in screen dialogue, it being a detail the camera attends to. On the stage, people declaim; on the screen, they talk. A sprightly miss in Sweetheart is Frances Hunt. Charlie Winninger, Andy Devine, Bill Gargan, Frank Jenks and Donald Meek are among the established favorites who appear to advantage. Several specialty numbers rank highly in entertainment value. George Robinson's photography is excellent, and Bernard Burton is entitled to credit for a fine job of film editing. The five different literary gentlemen who are responsible for the story can take bows for their contribution, but I am afraid I never will be able to understand how such commendable results can be attained by such a heavy mass movement.

One of the Good Musicals . . .

IJELL above the average in entertainment values: good to look at, pleasant to listen to, interesting to follow. Buddy DeSylva, producer, seems to think a connected story is a desirable element in a musicdance-spectacle production, and has given You're a Sweetheart one which holds together the whole thing

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and in its forward progress picks up, more or less logically, each of the special features with which the picture is provided so abundantly. Another notion Buddy apparently has is that we would rather be entertained by the merit of an act than be stupefied by its bulk. Sweetheart by no means is a little production, but it does not carry its bigness to the point of oppressiveness—does not pack the screen so tightly that we feel the performers should be given more air. Visually, Sweetheart is a treat. I believe the production is the most ambitious to date to be designed by young Jack Otterson, Universal's art director. The results he accomplishes make safe the prediction of a brilliant career for him. His sets mean something beyond the mere expenditure of money. The production is modern, the music being of the present mood, and it is obvious that Otterson and his associate, Richard Riedel, planned appropriate backgrounds to enhance production value and at the same time to give their interpretation of the prevailing trend.

Otterson's Sets Outstanding . . .

INQUESTIONABLY motion pictures are a potential factor in influencing the architecture of today, and apparently Otterson proceeded on the theory that his purpose was not only to provide smartness and atmosphere for the story, but also to show progress in designing. Stylized Colonial, as portrayed in a millionaire's boathouse and a penthouse apartment, give necessary glamor and yet retain warmth and genuine charm. The same thought is carried out in the creation of the musical production numbers, beginning with the rather realistic design of a glorified valentine for the You're a Sweetheart number, and ending with the highly stylized and symbolic Oh, Oh, Oklahoma setting. I devote more than usual space to the sets in this picture as they figure so largely in the pleasure it will give. The same appreciation of appropriateness and good taste is in evidence throughout the entire production. Smartness is the predominating note. David Butler's direction keeps the story moving briskly, interpolated comedy darting into and out of it without seriously impeding its progress. Solo musical numbers, however, have a tendency to slow it up. And that gave me a thought.

IS ALMOST A MOTION PICTURE . . .

 SERGEANT MURPHY; Warners; associate producer, Bryan Foy; director, B. Reeves Eason; dialogue director, Frank Beckwith; story, Cy Bartlett; screen play, William Jacobs; photographer, Ted McCord; film editor, James Gibbon; assistant director, William Kissell. Cast: Ronald Reagan, Mary Maguire, Donald Crisp, Ben Hendricks, William Davidson, Max Hoffman Jr., David Newell, Emmett Vogan, Tracey Lane, Edmund Cobb, Ellen Clancy, Rosella Towne, Helen Valkis, Sam McDaniels.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

UNPRETENTIOUS Sergeant Murphy comes the nearest to being a motion picture of anything I have seen in many evenings of film veiwing. Its story is told preponderantly in visual terms; the backgrounds are variegated in content and possess freshness, many of the scenes being out-of-doors; and be-

cause dialogue is subjugated to story movement, there is a good deal more action in the film than is to be found in most talkies. To top things off, someonelet us credit Producer Foy-had the inspired idea of setting large portions of the picture to music. Who is responsible for the musical background my credit sheet does not disclose. It is not particularly imaginative in concept, but it is music. In some strange way it gives new significance and greater beauty to the leafy bows of the trees in the woodland scene, to the rhymic movements of the racing animal about which the story centers—it becomes a part of them. And far from being a distraction for the dialogue, the music enhances the speeches. B. Reeves Eason has directed the piece with fitting simplicity and ease. His principal players are genuine and friendly in their performances, his supporting players always believable. There is no villain in the story, the conflict being rather with circumstance. Probably the commendable directness of the story is attributable in no small measure to the fact that only two writers had a hand in creating it, Cy Bartlett writing the original, William Jacobs doing the screen play.

Is Altogether Pleasant . . .

RONALD REAGAN is coming along as a screen actor. He has gained noticeably in ease, in sureness of gesture, and in the ability to get his thoughts and emotions into the camera, since the last feature part in which I saw him appear. Audiences like him. As the young man who has joined the army in order to be near a horse, Sergeant Murphy, which his father has sold to the army, and who, determined to regain possession of the animal and train him for a champ, perseveres against circumstances and impecuniosity until finally, after the army days are over, he brings the horse to victory in an English steeplechase—as this fellow, Reagan handles both his lighter scenes and his heavy ones with an engaging spirit and conviction. Sophisticates may hold against the film the depiction of such devotion to a horse, claiming it smacks of sentimentality. Maybe it does. But there are many things I should care less to seen on the screen than a championing of loyalty, even if it is for a horse. Sharing his affections, of course, is Mary Maguire, very comely and thoroughly capable, albeit I did think her diction was a bit broad for an American girl. Donald Crisp gives an excellently balanced and well shaded performance of the Colonel, her father. Ben Hendricks, William Davidson and Max Hoffman, Jr. are others in a large cast of supporting players who do competent work. Sergeant Murphy, unfortunately, is not credited, but he strikes me as being a very nice horse, and certainly his exhibitions of jumping added interest and color to the picture. Ted McCord has done a careful job of photographing the story, many of the scenes of which were taken in an actual U.S. Army camp. Editor James Gibbon has kept the yarn moving along rapidly and smoothly. The climax would have been more effective if we had seen Reagan and his horse take a spill, rather than being told about it by a narrator on the radio. Perhaps Old Man Budget had something to do with this. Everything considered, however, Sergeant Murphy is an altogether pleasant little piece.

NOT QUITE EVERYTHING . . .

● SHE'S GOT EVERYTHING: RKO; producer, Albert Lewis; director, Joseph Santley: screen play, Harry Segall and Maxwell Shane: photographer, Jack MacKenzie; music director, Frank Tours; film editor, Frederic Knudtson. Cast: Gene Raymond, Ann Sothern, Victor Moore, Helen Broderick, Parkyakarkus, Solly Ward, Alec Craig, Fred Santley, Richard Tucker, George Irving, Jack Carson, William Brisbane.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

CHE'S GOT EVERYTHING has not quite everything, notwithstanding what the psychologyminded title dubbers would suggest to the minds of the public with this flamboyant, if somewhat trite, title, but it has some original touches, a good farce spirit, and, when it is hitting its stride, succeeds in being very amusing. Both Ann Sothern and Gene Raymond are seen to better advantage than in most of their previous appearances. The screen play, by Harry Sogall and Maxwell Shane, places them in numerous outlandish situations, and they antic through them with an excellent comic flair. Especially amusing is the portion in which Raymond, the head of a coffee concern, suspecting that his fiancee, Miss Sothern, is a schemer after his wealth, endeavors to discourage her by revealing his "impulses"—ordering chop suey and champagne for their breakfast, at which they are serenaded by a negro trap drummer who performs on tin cans, and finally insisting on buying her an outrageous outfit in a gown shop, the hat of which is topped by some ridiculous feathers which droop sadly over the comely one's face when he insists on taking her for a walk in the rain. In another sequence of the picture Miss Sothern sings very pleasantly a song, It's Sleepy Time in Hawaii, by Leon and Otis Rene.

Page the Maestro . . .

THE film does not always boast such spontaneous fun, however. Its chief shortcomings seem due largely to attempts to find sufficient action in the story for the several other featured players to perform. There is a long and raucous sequence having to do with the hypnotizing of Helen Broderick by Solly Ward, and involving Victor Moore, which does not "hold". Nor do the monkeyshines of Parkyakarkus, Billy Gilbert, and William Brisbane, three of the impecunious girl's creditors much interested in her marriage, succeed in engaging our interest. In other scenes, however, Helen Broderick and Victor Moore do clever work. And Solly Ward again impresses us with his versatility. Music can do wonders to enliven dull spots, contributing color and pace. In my viewing of pictures I never cease to be amazed that producers do not make greater use of it. Many scenes fairly beg for a musical background, like a dry, parched mouth craving water. In She's Got Everything, what music is presented, provided and well directed by Frank Tours, adds immeasurable color to the picture. Other assets are some brighthued sets by Van Nest Polglase and Al Herman, and some first-rate photography by Jack McKenzie. A miniature fashion show is staged by Ann Sothern in the dress shop sequence, in which she wears some creations by Edward Stevenson, which I judge to be very chic.

IS A GAY LITTLE COMEDY . . .

● PRESCRIPTION FOR ROMANCE; Universal; associate producer, Edmund Grainger; director, Sylvan Simon: screen play, James Mulhauser, Robert T. Shannon and Albert R. Perkins; original story, John Reinhardt and Robert Neville; photography, Milton Krasner; art director, Jack Otterson; film editor, Paul Landras; musical director, Charles Previn. Cast: Wendy Barrie, Kent Taylor, Mischa Auer, Dorothea Kent, Frank Jenks, Henry Hunter, Gregory Gaye, Samuel S. Hinds, Bert Roach, Frank Reicher, Christian Rub, Ted Osborn.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DVENTURE is the keynote of Prescription for A Romance, Budapest the locale, and the piece succeeds very well in enlisting and sustaining our interest. The picture holds a good pace, and the intrigues and tangents of the characters are plentifully spiced with humor. Not everything is subtle, not everything is believable, but as a picture it is entertaining. Romance goes hand in hand with intrigue, contributed by the delightful Wendy Barrie, well teamed with Kent Taylor. Director Sylvan Simon has handled the entire proceedings with his tongue in his cheek, a treatment which glosses over numerous incredibilities and keeps the picture so close to the level of farce that it can descend to some absurd comedy situations without giving the audience much of a bump. Most amusing of such scenes of horseplay is that in which the boy and girl and Mischa Auer, again an eccentric count, get stuck with their animal ambulance, which they have stolen, in the middle of a large pond of water, a contretempts out of which each emerges with a mud bath. Other scenes, however, are of a more graceful tenor. One of the attributes of the picture is the colorful sets for the Budapest sequences, by Jack Otterson and his associate, Charles H. Clarke, rich in Hungarian flavor. Another asset to the tone of the film is the photography of Milton Krasner, whose shots have variety in composition and are frequently beautifully lighted.

We Believe She Believes . . .

WENDIE BARRIE, as Dr. Wilson, an American girl studying medicine in Europe, is thoroughly enjoyable in her part, portraying its many disposi-



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tions and transitions of dispositions, with sensitiveness and conviction. The fact that she persuades us to regard as believable what she does, is a vital factor in the success of the comedy, for not everything her character is called upon to do is intrinsically credible. The girl's blind belief in the honesty of an embezzler, who is wanted by the law in America, and her affording him refuge-he had once been nice to her father—is a case in point, and a very important one, for upon her trust hangs the tale. As the young American detective who mixes business with pleasure, making love to the comely doctor while trailing her as a suspect, even though she knows his intentions and he knows she knows his intentions, Kent Taylor has a difficult assignment. On the whole he performs it very capably. He has gained considerable ease in her work, and I predict that he will soon be hitting his stride as a purveyor of sophisticated comedy, even though he still strikes me as being more foolish than clever in the delivery of some of his bon mots. Mischa Auer puts a good deal of fun into the show, as usual, this time assisted by a cute little dog, Mitzi; but methinks John Public is going to weary soon of seeing him constantly as a predatory European rascal. Good work is done by several other players in the cast, prominent among which are Dorothea Kent, Frank Jenks, Henry Hunter, and Gregory Gaye.

What Ten Could Have Done . . .

WITH apologies to Dan of the linotype, I list the sundry authors of the opus: screen play by James Mulhauser, Robert T. Shannon and Albert R. Perkins; original story, John Reinhardt and Robert Neville. 'Twas my intention to speak earlier of the fruitful huddle apparently gone into by Director Sylvan Simon and Cinematographer Milton Krasner over some of their scenes. A particularly interesting use is made of long shots in various parts of the film. At one point a rather fascinating bit of pantomime is enacted entirely in the distance—Mischa Auer runs down the street with Mitzi under his arm, hails a bicycle rider, trades the dog for the bicycle and rides off, after which the little dog jumps from the arms of his new master and scurries after the old. Editor Paul Landras is to be commended for allowing such things, as well as for the smooth progression of the other scenes.

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. OPTOMETRIST

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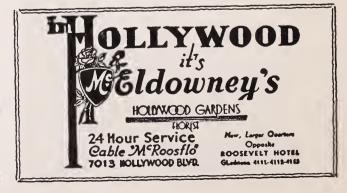
CASE FOR THE CUT-BACK

By Ralph Birchard

IN THE current new technique of picture making any self-respecting director would die of mortification if caught introducing the outmoded cut-back. Action, we are told, must progress chronologically. If necessary to tell something that happened in the past, let it be narrated. In this there is, I admit, a certain logic, a certain fidelity to realism. But does not the loss exceed the gain? Seeing is believing. Is it not more convincing to see what happened than to hear it described? I may be wrong, but I do not think the movie audience resents or even notices the violation of realism which technically occurs when some shadow on the screen says: "Remember, Bustamente, twelve years ago in Playa del Sol . . . " and the scene dissolves into what happened then. On the contrary, this technique is a convention accepted without question, with gratitude, in fact, for the movie miracle which permits us so conveniently to juggle time and

Visual Presentation Preferable ...

T IS not so long ago that Preston Sturges—or somebody—was being acclaimed for the discovery of a new technique in The Power and The Glory, wherein, after the death of the leading character (Spencer Tracy), Frank Morgan narrates, in explanation and justification, the story of their long friendship. This widely heralded discovery—"narratage", some enthusiast called it-was, of course, nothing more nor less than a masterly use of the good old cutback. I do not know whether it was the manner of the telling or Spencer Tracy's superb realization of the leading character, but The Power and The Glory is more vivid in my memory than all but one or two pictures I have seen since. Radio drama makes frequent use of cut-back technique. And while it is true that the intrusion of the narrator is often annoying, and that the perfect radioplay would contain no narration, still, it is nearly impossible to present a long story without connecting links of narration. By all means let the story move steadily forward. But when it is essential that the audience know a past event, then it is foolish, I think, for the sake of a mere technical consistency, to substitute narration for a visual presentation infinitely more real and moving.



MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

CALL for Mr. and Mrs. Public! Paging Miss and Master Public! The caller wishes to know whether the unregistered guests at the ten thousand and one picture houses from Maine to California would accept a cartoon, filmic and musically, such as that screened at the Esquire Theatre these days? The "such as" is not a request for imitation. Imitations as a rule remain just what the word implies. The "such as" refers to the type of presentation procedure. It is not my business to suggest the quality and style of shorts, but this form of screen entertainment could prove a splendid field for the ample and not utilized musical talent. Composers are apt to fail in building an appropriate score for a full-length picture of an hour and a half or longer. But, by their shorts ye shall know them. The cartoon preceding Club de Femmes at the Esquire is remarkable. Here is a volatile, fanciful, graphically beautiful display of filmic motion, accompanied by music, but entirely without dialogue or song. The character of the score, without trying to be motion-graphic, charmingly reflects and sustains the extravaganzas of imagination which this cartoon exhibits. In this spirit the cartoon ideally serves as a fitting overture for the feature film. Joie de Vivre, or the Joy of Living, as this cartoon is called, embodies the elusiveness of A Nous la Liberte, only the aesthetic-graphic element predominates of story-logic, dramatic plausibility. The screen shows scenes which might have come from a salon of French dry-point etchings, and Tibor Harsanyi, the composer, employs the same elusive method. In fact, music here supplies often only a bit of background "lighting," making this phantasy all the more enjoyable by deftly touching on the delightful unreal treatment of what Hollywood would call: Boy Chases Girls.'

Should Be Used As Model . . .

THAT minor rhythms of screen action and music—those of walking, running, railroad trains racing past and through each other-are extremely well timed merely adds to the momentum of general filmic tional and total action tempo. The score by Tibor Harsanyi is exceptional as screen music and if I were motion tempo. It is never obvious. This dual-control, to grab at a term, of rhythm happily emphasizes fracto conduct a school for motion picture composers, I would play, i.e. show, Joie de Vivre every now and again to impress the student with the fact that filmic motion music must not be obstructed by ponderous tone-sayings. Music in a film of this kind, must aid the tempo and spur the thythm. In this case it suggests airliness. It avoids everything pedestrian. Harsanyi's music is always present. Yet it is never in the way. It acts as a sort of tonal Puck, as a lively prompter.

Writing Story to Music . . .

FROM St. Louis comes a surprising answer to this delightful relationship between sound and sight in this animated cartoon. Many a composer has prayed that some day he might be commissioned to write music that a sympathetic producer would have a dramatist write an action story to fit, instead of music which is an accessory and treated accordingly when the film reaches the cutting-room. It seems that Harsanyi, who is a young Hungarian modernist, living in Paris, composed the Joie de Vivre scores as a "Divertissement cinematgoraphique". It was performed as concert music in Europe and not so long ago also by the St. Louis Symphony. The always authoritatively informed Harry F. Burke provided the program notes for this presentation, Mr. Vladymir Golschman being the conductor: "Not that it was composed as a musical accompaniment to a film, but that he has set himself a peculiar artistic problem which is to capture in the terms of tone the spirit of that flow of movement which is graphically accomplished in the structure of a cinematographic presentation. He is seeking to translate into tone that smooth facility of transition in mood and scene which are characteristic of the films, and, to present in mobile fashion against that constantly moving background, the sonorous silhouettes of his musical themes.'

Gay and Diverting Piece . . .

IN OTHER words, here is a film in music. Harsanyi then set out frankly and definitely "to present in orchestral colors the changing atmosphere and the mobile graphic design which are the bases of film interest." It is a gay and diverting piece, quite kaleidoscopic of humor and situations. Continues friend Burke: "Harsanyi himself has confessed that this might be considered as the accompaniment to some animated cartoon which exists only in his imagination, and which will probably never have an existence except as in the delightful echo of his fancy." Indeed, the musical flow of Joie de Vivre is such that the action must have followed the music. This may be the approach to ideal filmic action for which Editor Beaton asks in the opening paragraphs of last week's issue; but it is a very feasible one, and also one which would open up an extraordinary scope of expression. Of course, someone will say that the American public would stay away. What proofs are there pro or con, except that radio, films, public schools have made millions music conscious? Last week three audiences crowded Philharmonic Auditorium in Los Angeles within the four days, enjoying the dramatic pantomimes of the Jooss Ballet. The same success crowns this aggregation of dance-actors in hundreds of American and foreign cities. What does the Jooss Ballet offer, but silent films or animated cartoons in person, accompanied by well-prepared music? Or, in three out of four (sometimes lengthy) offerings during

an evening's entertainment, the music had been written and the pantomimic dance action fitted within the frame of a well defined story. I am not a booking agent for either Mr. Harsanyi or Mr. Jones, but their modes of procedure would benefit the art of the screen imaginatively and dramatically. To dispel any misapprehension, the Jooss group does not employ the conventional ballet technic.

Lively and Modern Score . . .

LITHE as the girls in the Club de Femmes (at the Esquire), is also the musical score written by Marius Francois Gaillard in a lively and yet mildly modern fashion. In keeping with the nature of the subject, the music is lively. One has occasionally a sense of ecstacy and yearning as in Joie de Vivre. While music is used but spasmodically, yet Gaillard enhances and deepens situations. There are poignant fragments in various sections of the film. After a tragic occurrence the screen shows a servant sweeping the wilted leaves down the front steps of the girls' club. The music emphasizes the meaning of this short scene. Gaillard writes wittily and again with gentle feeling, such as in the brief love-scene with its biological consequence. He exhibits terse humor, as in the moment when the crying of the baby is heard in the corridor of the club. The timbre of the scoring, (containing nice woodwind effects), is as amusingly brittle and clipped as the beautifully spoken dialogue. The whole record is pleasing to the ear and the end title music is not hurriedly worked into a blaring climax, but quietly sustains a thought-provoking mood.

DOWN WITH THE LIDS!

By Robert Joseph

TIKE the outfielder who insists upon playing for the L bleachers instead of for the team, Hollywood is muffing again. Instead of making a complete rout of the campaign to silence air gossipers and purify the air, in the name of decency as well as good box-office, Hollywood drops the bone to bark at its own reflection in the water. Currently the attempt to clean up is going nowhere fast. This time the motion picture industry had everything behind it: the force of public opinion, the assistance of radio networks and radio stations, the encouragement of the very sponsors of some of the gossipers themselves, the backing of some of the industry's most potent names: Darryl Zanuck, George Jessel, Will Hays, Adolph Zukor, Cecil B. de Mille; the timidity of the dirty linen washers to stick their necks out too far, the tremendous publicity facilities of every studio, the cooperation of trade papers, press syndicates and news editors. But the ball just rolls between his feet because the outfielder wants to take a special fancy bow.

Jessel and Fischer Debate . . .

NOTHING more clearly indicates what happened when the campaign started to go amuck, than the so-called debate between George Jessel and George Fischer, drama editor of the Los Angeles Evening

News. As the radio comedian previously had maintained on several of his "Thirty Minutes in Hollywood" air programs, the private affairs of the stars were no concern of the public at large, and that alleged exposés and gossip based on false, fabricated or partially true facts, were harmful to the picture industry. He recommended a strong vigilance on the part of the publicity departments in helping the radio gossipers assemble their material for programs. The answer given by Editor George Fischer was a model of bad logic and non sequitur. He accused Mr. Jessel of climbing on the bandwagon when the going was good. In shaded language he intimated that the comedian was a publicity seeker who was making the campaign a good thing for himself. With that admonition, the forceful part of Fischer's speech was finished. Now Editor Fischer might have been well laughed at, not only for trying to befog the issue, but for puerile forensic tactics-if he had not said the same thing the very campaigners themselves were saying. The point is that at present the industry is more intent on establishing the priority of the cleanup leadership than it is on the cleanup itself.

Divided We Fall . . .

LET it be said parenthetically that the Spectator has been writing for many months of the sad state of affairs which unites studios and dirt-dishers in the common cause of mud-slinging. Here ends the Spectator's claim for immortality. Mr. Unger appeared with a ringing editorial of challenge in the October 21 issue of Variety. Since that time the writer has been taken into the confidence of three editors (Mr. Beaton never pressed his claims), and told that they individually were the real originators of the fight. Several weeks ago the Los Angeles Examiner instituted a series of signed articles, written under the byline of some of the most prominent figures in the industry. Mr. Unger's very own Variety and the Hollywood Reporter pooh-poohed the daily as a latecomer on this merry merry-go-round. Then Warner Brothers refused to be included in the round-robin measures of protest formulated by the Motion Picture Producers' and Distributors' Association. What solidarity! What unity of purpose!

Why General Indifference? . . .

TO RETURN to the original premise of the entire campaign, the writer vaguely recalls, in spite of the dust, fog, clouds and dirt that have been scattered and spattered within the recent past, that all parties were concerned with sweeping the radio lanes clean of bad Hollywood publicity. The fight was actively successful enough in the beginning to result in the termination of the air services of two gossipers and to send the rest scurrying under the nearest rocks. Now, however, much to the confusion and disappointment of those who are still really intent upon improving conditions, and much to the undoubted amusement of the gossipers themselves, Hollywood's guns have made a complete circuit and are directed on its own turrets. Considered typical of the general attitude

now in effect among the battling units of the bedraggled army of reform, this priceless Quigley Mo-tion Picture Herald headline: "LAUNCELOT JES-SEL JOUSTS FOR GUINEVERE HOLLY-WOOD,"

Unite and Fight . . .

WHAT a wonderful editorial picnic for one of Mr. Quigley's headline writers! What a field day for that publisher's bizarre-minded hacks! At present none of this touches Quigley Publications, or any publisher of like mind, but it will some day, when people begin to turn from the stars in disgust and neglect the box-office; and when the box-office in turn neglects the home office; and the home office neglects to authorize Mr. Quigley's advertising department to insert eight beautiful pages of slick-paper promotion. Mr. Quigley's blurb to the effect that his publication "is constantly aware of the responsibility it bears to the industry of which it is a part" seems somewhat ludicrous as well as inept in the light of the above. The publisher's attitude unfortunately is typical of many others. Let Hollywood factions sacrifice their pride by not looking upon the campaign as something for self-promotion! Let Hollywood reconcile itself to the awful fact that such priority claims yield empty honors! Let Hollywood get out there and clamp down those garbage pail lids!

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

IDEALS ARE PRESENTED . . .

DISILLUSIONING but amusing counterpoint to the rhapsody of filmania is played by the various adjuncts of the industry, officials, press men, photographers and others who appear in the still pictures taken at public affairs along with the glamorous personalities of the screen — both disillusioning and amusing because of its discordancy. By contrast, the adjuncts make us realize that screen personalities are, after all, rare beings among their fellows, the most gifted in physical beauty and vitality; and that life, after all, is not as glamorous as it is shown to us on the screen. What we see there are the ideals of our race.

LESS COLOR FOR MORE COLOR . . .

ONE of the most impressive shots in Ebb Tide, the Paramount color picture, is the close-up of the captain's face at his death. There is not a great deal of color in it. Rather does it abound in shadows, not only in background but in the face itself, every tragic line of which is deeply shaded. I think the effectiveness of the shot indicates a common error of approach to color photography, the failure to recognize the value of black and the dark tones of colors. Most films of the sort have been far too lavish in the use of color. The greatest visual implements for conveying an impression are still light and shade. They are what create the telling patterns on



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the screen. The best color work I can recall has always tended toward understatement in color and toward boldness of outline in black or dark tones. It occurs to me that the beautiful shot of Hollywood at night as viewed from the hills in A Star Is Born, owed much of its effectiveness to the predominance of dark tones, which were not only greatly suggestive, calling into play the imagination with respect to what wonders of Hollywood might lie below, concealed by the night, but which also created a beautiful pattern of lines and spaces, to say nothing of emphasizing by contrast the sprinkling of color in the shot. The Old Masters knew the value of shadows and shadings. And the future masters of color on the screen will make great use of them too.

LUISE RAINER'S MOUTH . . .

MORE than any other actress in motion pictures, Luise Rainer has developed the possibilities of using her mouth as a means of visual expression. Most actresses use their mouths only to paint oversize lips on, to pull back, exposing their teeth, when they are supposed to be happy, and to droop in some careless way when they are supposed to be in an opposite mood. With La Rainer the oral organ is an ever revealing, frequently eloquent instrument, mirroring many shades of feeling. Who can forget the part it played in portraying the wistfulness, the humility, the mingled ignorance and instinctive wisdom of O-Lan in The Good Earth?

ANOTHER ILLUSION SHATTERED . . .

PRIZE remark of the week: I stood before the window of an antique shop on Sunset Boulevard, intrigued by the array of delicately wrought porcelains and sundry other bric-a-brac strewn within, as two buxom ladies came along. Without slackening her pace, said one to the other, "How would you like to dust that?"

Something-Ought-to-Be-Done-About-It Department: Either Uncle Sam's apartment house mail boxes should be made bigger or the current rash of oversize magazines should be smaller—Spectator size for choice.

ENTERTAINMENT PLUS EDUCATION

ALTHOUGH edited chiefly for church people, Christian Century, Chicago, displays a broadminded conception of secular issues occupying the public mind. Apparently its editors are in accord with the Spectator's recent challenge of Martin Quigley's contention that the screen is solely an art medium without obligation to be of service to the public by disseminating propaganda for social betterment. In a recent issue, Christian Century has this to say: "In launching his film version of the powerful social drama, Dead End, Samuel Goldwyn struck this keynote: It's about time Hollywood did something of significance for public welfare as well as the

usual trivia. He went on to say that he has an idea that the screen can be used to promote civic betterment as well as for purposes of entertainment. In Dead End he demonstrates the truth of this new and welcome doctrine. The film tells the story of a group of boys and girls in a city slum. It portrays vividly the way lives are warped in such surroundings. The picture is both excellent entertainment and first-class civic education. Warner Brothers have accomplished a similar combination in their Life of Emile Zola and in They Won't Forget. These pictures give a convincing answer to those spokesmen for the motion picture industry who have contended that the movies have no function except entertainment. No one questions that their first business is entertainment. In fact, most pictures could well be more entertaining than they are. But the very nature of movies and the power of their emotional appeal make them more than entertainment. They subtly influence character, shape emotional attitudes, set behavior patterns, and establish values. They thus help to determine one's outlook on life, individual and social. To this extent the movies are educational whether the producers know it or not, for this is the essential business of education. The trouble with many movies is that they educate in the wrong direction. They make wrong attitudes seem right, false standards look true. The better pictures have been more realistic, more honest. When more producers adopt Mr. Goldwyn's idea we shall have better entertainment and with it better education.

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A Weekly

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Twelfth Year

Los Angeles, California—January 15, 1938

Vol. 12-No. 30

What Do The Various "Ten Best"
Lists Show Us?

One Way To Put a Stop to Malicious Radio Gossipers

Players Are Victims of Mistakes In Picking Stories

Bruno Ussher Urges Grand Opera As Screen Material

... REVIEWS ...

THE BUCCANEER ★ SWING YOUR LADY ★ PENROD AND HIS TWIN BROTHER

LOVE ON A BUDGET ★ LOVE IS A HEADACHE ★ HAWAIIAN BUCKAROO

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FILM DAILY'S TEN BEST . . .

BY VIRTUE of the thoroughness with which it conducts its poll, we accept each year Film Daily's list of ten best pictures as reflecting the best judgment of those who review screen programs for the press of the United States and Canada. Likewise we accept as authentic Motion Picture Herald's list of the ten best box-office names each year; and we are gaining confidence in Box-Office Digest's figures revealing the relative earnings of the various pictures re-leased during the year. The three lists just about cover the entire financial field, leaving to the Academy the decision as to the artistic achievements of the year just closed. The Academy is yet to be heard from, but the three completed lists offer an opportunity for some interesting speculation. When we consider the critics' ten best of the year, the question arises: Who are the best judges—the people who write about pictures or the people for whom they are made? Pictures are made to be sold to the public, all of them are produced for the purpose of making money, consequently we may accept the ten which made the most money as reflecting the public's rating of the ten best.

What Various Polls Reveal . . .

CCORDING to the compilation of Box-Office A Digest, the ten best pictures of the year with the best box-office records, the figures being based on the average earnings of the theatres in which they were shown, are:

Saratoga After the Thin Man Waikiki Wedding The Awful Truth A Star Is Born

Thin Ice Maytime The Plainsman Lost Horizon One In a Million

The critics' ten best are, in order:

Life of Emile Zola The Good Earth Captains Courageous Lost Horizon A Star Is Born

Romeo and Juliet Stage Door Dead End Winterset The Awful Truth

By comparing the list we find that only three of the critics' ten best are among the ten best performers at the box-office. By reference to Box-Office Digest's figures of box-office earnings, we find that the critics' best come in this order in the year's big-

gest moneymakers: Zola, 31st; Good Earth, 14th; Captains Courageous, 15th; Lost Horizon, 8th; Star Is Born, 10th; Romeo and Juliet, 77th; Stage Door, 33rd; Dead End, 32nd; Awful Truth, 4th. Apparently Winterset was released prior to the period covered by Digest's compilation, as I cannot find it in the list.

Best Players and Box-Office . . .

JOW let us glance over the list of the best box-N office players as reported by Motion Picture Herald and determine what we can make of it. They are:

Shirley Temple Clark Gable Robert Taylor Bing Crosby William Powell Jane Withers Astaire and Rogers Sonja Henie Gary Cooper Myrna Loy

By going back over the ten best pictures designated by the critics, we make the interesting discovery that none of the ten best players appeared in one of them, even though the players' ratings were established by a compilation of the exhibitors' replies to the Herald's request: "Name the ten players whose pictures drew the greatest number of patrons to your theatre." And in the ten pictures which head Digest's box-office list, we find that only three of the ten best box-office players appeared in any of the ten best box-office pictures, Clark Gable in Saratoga, Sonja Henie in Thin Ice and One In a Million, and Bing Crosby in Waikiki Wedding. It is somewhat confusing. Shirley Temple heads the list of money-making stars by a wide margin, yet in the list of moneymaking pictures eleventh place is the nearest to the top one of her pictures gets, while another, Heidi, is in fortieth place.

Becoming More Muddled . . .

WE FIND that the more we go into our analysis of the three lists the more muddled we become. Clark Gable is second on the players' list, yet his second picture is sixtieth on the box-office picture list. Bob Taylor is the third box-office player, yet the best one of his pictures did was to get into twenty-seventh place among the moneymakers, and his next appearance ties with Heidi for fortieth place. Bill Powell, fifth in box-office rating, appeared in pictures which stand in sixteenth and sixty-first places on the box-office list. What I cannot get into

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VoCnts

my head is how players get such good box-office rating when the pictures they played in did not do so well. There seems to be something screwy somewhere. The Spectator did not present a ten-best picture list, contenting itself with naming what it considered the best of each kind of picture. Four it named are among the critics' ten best; five it named are among the first fifteen box-office successes. The one it named as the best class B production of the year, Alcatraz, led the list of moneymakers in its class. I believe the Spectator's record is the most consistent of the lot, but I have exhausted my analytical brain and refuse to undertake the further effort that would be required to settle the matter.

From Another Angle . . .

A COUPLE of days after I had written the foregoing, the New Year's number of Variety arrived from New York to add fresh complications to the box-office standing subject. It scanned the wide world for information and announces that among players, the leaders, reckoned on the basis of actual box-office draw during the year 1937, stand in the following order:

Gary Cooper Greta Garbo Clark Gable Shirley Temple Powell-Loy Astaire-Rogers Robert Taylor Marlene Dietrich Paul Muni Jeanette MacDonald

As a factual record, Variety's listing is interesting, but as determining the relative popularity of screen players, I do not think it is as illuminating as the Motion Picture Herald's list. Exhibitors who were canvassed by the Herald, instead of basing their replies on actual box-office figures for one year, no doubt cast their votes for the players who, on the whole, receive the warmest welcome each season from the patrons of their houses. When we get down to actual figures, as Variety does, the element of chance figures largely in establishing ratings. For instance, if no picture in which Gary Cooper played had been shown last year, his name would not have appeared in Variety's list, but the popularity he had won in previous years might have earned him a place among the Herald's leading players. But Gary was lucky enough to have four of his pictures showing last year, Mr. Deeds, Bengal Lancer, The Plainsman, Souls at Sea. However, there can be no question about the popularity of those whose names are included in both lists, a distinction Gary shares with Clark Gable, Shirley Temple, William (Powell, Myrna Loy, Astaire-Rogers and Bob Taylor.

EXCEEDINGLY PLEASING GESTURE . . .

A FINE note on the Hollywood Parade broadcast last week was a tribute by Dick Powell to Mr. and Mrs. Bing Crosby. It not only was written beautifully, but Dick read it superbly—a fine gesture by one film player to another and one which will create a good impression everywhere. It is refreshing to hear an expression of respect and affection so simply and so feelingly offered. It serves to

purify the air which has been fouled by the odor of malicious gossip so many broadcasters indulge in.

RADIO GOSSIP AND BOX-OFFICE . . .

ELEMENTAL observation: The box-office value Le of a motion picture player depends upon his or her personal popularity with the public. If the whole world is told that John Doe beats his wife and lets his children starve, no series of the greatest performances the screen has offered can make his name good box-office. It would be useless for his producer to plead that Doe's conduct at home has nothing to do with his screen appearances, an argument which can not be denied, but one which would have no influence with those whose money keeps the film industry going. In a lesser degree, but always in proportion to the gravity of the charges brought against screen players, is the box-office value of a player affected when we are told he has a nasty temper, is hard to get along along with, imbibes too freely. Not long ago, Jimmie Fidler told the nation, in effect, that a prominent player had got drunk in Hollywood and had awakened in New York. The next week Jimmie assured his air audience that it was overwork, not drink, which had led to the cross-country plane flight. The vast majority of his hearers will consider the original statement to have been a gratuitous presentation of the truth, and the later explanation an untrue retraction which had been forced on the broadcaster. The player's value to his producers was lessened by Jimmie's poking his nose into something that was none of his business, even if the player had been drunk. As I remarked once before in referring to Jimmie—it is a slimy way of making a living.

Industry Should Strike Back . . .

CTILL MORE recently, Jimmie told the world that Connie Bennett was hard to get along with. True, his words were not as blunt as mine, his charge being presented so obliquely that no one under two years of age could grasp the meaning of what he said, but his older listeners hereafter will recall what he said when they see Connie on the screen. Now, over our tea cups and highball glasses in Hollywood, we may discuss the personal idiosyncrasies of our actors and actresses, may acquit them or find them guilty when charges are brought against them, according to the cattiness of our various dispositions; but if we are to refrain from biting the hand that feeds us, beyond the boundaries of Hollywood our players are but shadows and we want them to go unblemished to the film theatres of the world. Jimmie's slap at Connie having come after both the broadcasting companies and the film industry had assured us that steps had been taken to silence malicious film gossipers, it would appear as if the wrong kind of silencer had been used. The film industry always has been afraid of its own shadow, always has been a pussyfooter suffering from a severe case of inferiority complex. It has in its camera the most powerful propaganda weapon, next to Radio, available to man, yet it is afraid to put up its fists when radio strikes at it. It kowtows to radio slanderers because they are in a position to say nice things about its pictures, and is forgetful of the fact unfavorable reference to a picture affects only that picture, while unfavorable reference to a player affects his whole career and reduces the box-office value of the pictures he appears in.

One Way to End It ...

LL those who harm pictures and picture peo-A ple by their malicious broadcasts are in the pay of sponsors who have products for sale. The way to curb the gossipers is through their sponsors, and the way to get action out of the sponsors is to tell them that the film industry will strike back unless an end is put to the practice of harming the salable quality of the industry's product by unfavorable mention of film people. Theatre owners could be counted on to give the industry full cooperation. If Jimmie Fidler persists in peddling harmful gossip, I think the exhibitors of the country would relish the opportunity to flash on the screen at each performance: "The manufacturers of Drene Shampoo pay Jimmie Fidler to broadcast malicious gossip about your screen favorites. Be loyal to your friends by scrubbing your pates with some other stuff." Of course, it might be worded more elegantly, but the idea is there. And the dust you would observe would be caused by the heels of all the sponsors scurrying to get from under by chasing their gossipers off the air.

SCREEN AND GRAND OPERA . . .

THOSE Spectator readers, if there be any who, because of their lack of interest in music's place on the screen, may not read all of Dr. Bruno David Ussher's contributions to these pages, should not overlook what he has to say in this issue about grand opera on the screen. He makes more explicit something to which I made only casual reference when I wrote recently that the screen is a better medium than the opera house for the presentation of grand opera.

SCREEN ACTORS AND OIL WELLS . . .

DOGER MARCHETTI has the right idea. He con $oldsymbol{\Lambda}$ tends that actors and actresses are entitled to as much consideration as the government gives oil wells. Because the more oil you take out, the less there is left to take, taxes on wells are on a graduating scale, becoming less as pumping proceeds. The screen being an industry which employs only young people for young parts and old people for old parts, its players can not look forward with assurance to prolonged careers. For that reason they receive high pay during the comparatively few years of their peak earning power. Washington, however, taxes them as it taxes bank presidents and all other executiveson the presumption that their incomes will remain at the peak figure until they either voluntarily resign or die. From what I can gather from reading the

papers, it seems to me that screen players have not been active enough in their efforts to be placed on a more equitable basis of taxation. There are enough big names in Hollywood to make an impression on Washington if a united effort were made. Marchetti is, or was, at the National Capital, doing what one man can do to effect a readjustment, but there are too many government sheep there to be stirred into action by a lone wolf.

How Stars Are Unmade . . .

CCREEN players are not the masters of their fates. Det us take the case of Kay Francis. Warners starred her in The First Lady, a smart, sophisticated story of Washington intrigue, lacking the elements which make for universal popularity. Her performance was in every way satisfactory, a consistent and intelligent characterization completely in the mood of the story. As should have been anticipated by the producers, the picture is not doing well at the boxoffice, something for which Kay is in no way responsible, yet in Variety's comments on what pictures are doing in New York, we find this reference to The First Lady: "It may serve as an indicator of the waning box-office draught of Kay Francis.' All Hollywood knows the danger that lies in such a comment as this. Motion picture producers are not ordinary human beings. The rest of us make mistakes; producers never make them. They choose the stories, dictate how the pictures should be made, and when one fails, it is the fault of the star or the director or both, never by virtue of unwise story material selected by the producers. Once let the idea spread that a star is losing his or her box-office strength, and the end of another career is in sight. Of course, anyone endowed with common sense knows that Kay Francis is not responsible for the poor business being done by The First Lady, knows that she is at the mercy of her producers who are liable to become convinced she is slipping and thereafter take little pains in selecting story material for her. Then she really would slip, not because the public ceased to like her, but because it would not like her in the parts she was made to play. It is a hazard Washington should be urged to take into account when considering a readjustment of the income tax as it applies to members of the acting profession.

DIRECTORS AND FILM CRITICISM . . .

A DIRECTOR, upon whose work in recent picture I commented unfavorably, writes me something I knew when I wrote my review—that the scene I criticized had been shot in the manner demanded by the associate producer, and not in the way the director would have shot it if he had been left alone. "I agree with what you say," he writes, "but why make me the goat when I couldn't do anything but obey orders?" If I had blamed the associate producer, I am afraid the director would have been blamed as the source of my information, and it might have got him in bad with the men he works for. Many times

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in writing reviews I am aware I am placing the blame on the wrong shoulders; and an equal number of times I give directors praise for fine bits of work which I know were the results of merely following directions they found in the scripts. So it all evens up.

PANAY PICTURES AND PEACE . . .

THE MAYOR of an Eastern city has forbidden the showing of Panay bombing pictures, his reason being that they would stir up too much feeling against Japan. He characterized them as "too exciting." The more excited the world can get over the horrors of war, the more assuredly will it demand the blessing of peace. The Panay pictures constitute one of the greatest peace sermons ever preached. Instead of being barred, they should be shown in every theatre, church, auditorium and hall possessing projection equipment.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

NOT being a drinking man, I have decided to found a cellar with the choice wines and liquors Santa Claus brought me. . . . I like to go shopping at our favorite market. . . . I wonder if Century-Fox players whose personal Christmas cards were mailed by the studio, are aware that a rubber-stamped advertisement of In Old Chicago was smeared on the envelopes. . . . A fat and spirited little bird just splashed so enthusiastically in the bath under the locust tree, that I had to drag my chair out of range to keep my pad from being sprinkled. . . . Been a disturbing morning. The spaniel found a hole in the wire fence, poked his head through, could go neither forward nor back and I had a devil of a time setting him free. The Pekinese was on my side; barked excited applause as I toiled to liberate her friend. . . . It is so warm, I am going inside; garden thermometer registers seventy-six, but I cannot be held responsible for the kind of weather we may have when this appears in print. . . . "Gowns by N'Was McKenzie," reads a Warner picture credit. The rest of the McKenzie clan should demand an explanation of that first name. . . . I like sport shirts, and if their Fauntleroy collars do not seem appropriate to my grey head, it's just too bad, but there is nothing I can do about it. . . . I jot these things down from day to day, keeping the sheet of paper on which I write them on the top of my pad. For instance, the above note about the heat was written a couple of days ago; I am back in the garden, noting with interest the busy little birds pecking at the meal I spread for them, darting over to their water for a sip, not a dip, then back again for another bite or two; the bath, I notice, comes after the meal is completed. . . . From where I sit, I can see a plane, silent because so far away, flying above a cloud of subdued white against the deep blue of the sky; the cloud seems to be traveling with him, for he continues to be over it; perhaps it feels it should do what it can in case he falls. . . . I think I will stop now and send this to the office; sometimes I go there, but not often; it is so nice in the country.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

BIG, BOISTEROUS, BEAUTIFUL . . .

● THE BUCCANEER; Paramount; producer-director. Cecil B. DeMille; associate producer, Wm. H. Pine; location director, Arthur Rosson; story, Lyle Saxon; adaptation, Jeanie Macpherson; screen play, Edwin Justus Mayer, Harold Lamb, C. Gardner Sullivan; photography, Victor Milner; special effects, Farciot Edouart, Dewey Wrigley; music score, George Antheil; music direction, Boris Morros; art directors, Hans Dreier, Roland Anderson; interior decorations, A. E. Freudemann; costumes, Visart, Dwight Franklin, Western Costume Co.; dialogue supervision, Edwin Maxwell; film editor, Anne Bauchens, Cast: Fredric March, Franciska Gaal, Margot Grahame, Akim Tamiroff, Walter Brennan, Anthony Quinn, Ian Keith, Douglas Dumbrille, Beulah Bondi, Robert Barrat, Fred Kohler, Hugh Sothern, John Rogers, Hans Steinke, Stanley Andrews, Spring Byington.

TOMPLETELY in the DeMille style, which is another way of saying it is big, boisterous, busy and beautiful. It contains some of the most gorgeous photography ever displayed on the screen. For two hours it brings to us a succession of scenes artistically composed, excellently photographed and understandingly directed. I do not recall a previous De-Mille production which suggested so much effort to achieve visually artistic results. As something to look at, The Buccaneer ranks among the best things the screen has done, yet at no place does it sacrifice drama or appropriateness of background in an effort to please the eye. It is a completely honest production, authentic in detail, unsparing in the use of money to recreate its period, sumptuous in dressing its scenes, adorning its women and peopling its sets. The year is young, but quite safely it may be predicted that this DeMille picture will be one of the outstanding productions of 1938, something the screen can be proud of for a long time to come.

More History Than Entertainment . . .

HISTORY, as screen material, offers great pictorial possibilities, but it is difficult to create and maintain the suspense that accompanied its enactment. The people who made history did not know the trend it would take, could not see the end of each development until it was reached. When it is reenacted on the screen, we know the outcome. When in The Buccaneer New Orleans is in danger of being captured by the British force which threatens it, we know Andrew Jackson saved it, consequently we cannot feel the suspense that doubt would create, and we regard without emotional reaction the various scenes which show us the successive steps in the successful defense of the city. As motion picture entertainment the picture's chief weakness is the result of its close adherence to fact. It was impossible in the brief scope of one screen offering to depict the entire career of the glamorous pirate, Lasitte, a man to whom a poet ascribes a thousand crimes to one good deed. As a screen hero, he had to be kept clean, had to gain and hold our sympathy, and always there were the facts of history to bar the use of fiction in making him more sympathetic than he really was. The producer, therefore, had to confine himself to

the one good deed among a thousand bad ones, and make the best of it. The consequence is that the story leaves Lafitte as it found him, a murderous pirate with a price on his head. It is good history, but not the best screen entertainment.

More the Actor Than the Person . . .

REDRIC MARCH always has played most important roles, but never has been an important box-office figure. He is a master of acting technique; we admire him, but never feel for him, his appeal being intellectual, not emotional. His Lafitte is a brilliant characterization, but we are conscious at all times that we are watching an actor playing the pirate, consequently we do not fear for his safety for we know nothing is going to happen to the actor, no matter what had happened to the pirate. We regard Franciska Gaal in a different way. For instance, we never saw her before, therefore it is easy for us to accept her as the person she plays; she is beautiful to look at, has eyes which graphically reveal her emotions, and is equally at home in comedy, romance and drama-a real find whom American audiences will take to their hearts. Another member of the cast whom we accept completely as the person he plays, is Akim Tamiroff, who contributes a performance of extraordinary merit, one which never suggests the actor. Margot Grahame, too, deserves praise for the feeling she displays in romantic scenes with March.

Two Unfinished Romances . . .

UDIENCES have grown so used to completed A romances that the romantic content of The Buccaneer probably will not give complete satisfaction. Here again the script writers were up against facts, but as, apparently, they could not conceive of a motion picture without romance, they supplied this one with a woman whom Lafitte loved and another one who loved Lafitte. Even though Margot Grahame returns Lafitte's love, she spurns him in the end, and as the picture fades out we are left in doubt as to the extent of his regard for Franciska Gaal. I believe the picture would have profited by a complete absence of romance, as the love scenes, by virtue of accomplishing nothing, merely serve to check the progress of the story. As a matter of fact, the ending of the picture leaves us with an empty feeling, the only thing it really finishes being the defence of New Or-

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. OPTOMETRIST

1725 North Highland Avenue Hollywood, California HEmpstead 8438 leans, and we knew the finish of that before the picture started. But do not assume from anything I have written that *The Buccaneer* is something you should avoid. I merely have been trying to tell you what you may expect. The picture is really a great achievement, one vastly to the credit of all those who had a hand in its making. DeMille's direction never has been better; his love scenes are as tender as his big shots are dramatic in action and massive in composition; his people are human, and technically the production is a triumph.

ONE WITH A NEW IDEA . . .

• SWING YOUR LADY; Warners production; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Sam Bischoff; screen play by Joseph Schrank and Maurice Leo; adapted from play by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson; directed by Ray Enright; assistant director, Jesse Hibbs; dialogue director, Jo Graham; photography, Arthur Edeson; art director, Esdras Hartley film editor, Jack Killifer; music and lyrics, M. K. Jerome and Jack Scholl; musical numbers created and directed by Bobby Connolly; music by Adolph Deutsch; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Frank McHugh, Louise Fazenda, Nat Pendleton, Penny Singleton, Allen Jenkins, Leon Weaver, Frank Weaver, Elviry Weaver, Ronald Reagan, Daniel Boone Savage, Hugh O'Connell, Tommy Bupp, Sonny Bupp, John Howard, Sue Moore, Olin Howland, Sammy White.

QUITE a departure. Actually a picture with a new idea in it. It carries swing music to the hills of Arkansas, and with four city slickers to several hundred hillbillies, the story is told largely out of doors. When I tell you that in the picture Louise Fazenda wants to engage in a wrestling match with Nat Pendleton to get money to buy a bedroom "soot" to make it necessary no longer for her to sleep on the cornhusks, you will have a strong suspicion Swing Your Lady is not a serious dramatic offering. You will be right. It is delightful nonsense. Also it is quite a remarkable picture—a production featuring music and dancing and without a single million dollar-set in it, nor a dress suit, fancy gown, light-lined grand staircase. A serious omission which may imperil its box-office success is the total absence of drinking. While I have not been able to grasp the psychological reason for it myself, the drinking scenes which feature so many pictures have led me to believe the box-office demands them—producers, you know, never are wrong-and here we have Sam Bishoff producing a picture with hundreds of hillbillies in it and every last one of them sober! It will make it unpopular with whiskey distillers whose interests nearly all pictures strive so hard to serve.

Hillbillies to the Fore . . .

RESPONSIBLE for a great deal of the entertainment quality of Swing Your Lady is the music of the hillbilly Weavers, an aggregation which extracts harmony from all sorts of weird instruments. It is an odd assortment of strings and woodwinds, but there is nothing odd about the music, which proves decidedly easy to listen to. The group also sings mountain songs in a most pleasing manner. The only complaint I have against the picture is that it

does not give us enough of the Weavers and not enough intimate shots of the different instruments they use. But what I heard or saw was enough to assure me that the Weavers could support a picture with a story written around their own experiences a primitive group; music in their souls; no money for instruments; contrive their own, principally from garden tools; finally are discovered; sensational success in big cities; somebody marries somebody; fadeout. There is nothing the matter with the Swing Your Lady story except its title, which does not prepare you at all for what you are going to see. If swing music effects you as it does me, you probably would avoid the picture, as you would expect it to be composed principally of ear-splitting screams. In so doing you would be denying yourself a tuneful treat.

Meet Daniel Boone, Savage . . .

DUT the music is only incidental to the story and D the story is entertaining enough to pay money to see. It is a weird sort of thing, consisting chiefly of things which would not happen except on the screen, and that is what makes it so entertaining. One of the most interesting features of the picture is the performance of Daniel Boone Savage. That is the name I find in the list of credits, but after seeing the picture I am inclined to suspect that what the compiler of the list wrote down was, "Daniel Boone, savage." Dan is a large person, ferociously bewhiskered, his voice of low, choaked pitch, but high in emotional content. He is a professional wrestler, and the way he and Nat Pendleton toss one another around when they meet in the ring to wrestle for the love of Louise Fazenda, gives the picture a great sporting uplift which should make it appeal to all those who enjoy watching gladiators gladiating. But Dan's athletic prowess does not constitute his sole claim to fame. He is the largest hunk of evidence I yet have found to support my contention that the screen is not an acting art, that it is absorption of a part by a player until he becomes the person he plays, then plays it, does not act. Dan is a wrestler; he plays a wrestler in this, his first, screen appearance; and I think I am safe in saying there is no experienced actor in the world who could play the part as convincingly. To start with he had what an actor has to train himself to acquire—the personality of the person he plays. The very absence of any suggestion of acting technique is what makes his performance a perfect one.

Enright Makes It Authentic . . .

RAY ENRIGHT had at his disposal one of the most interesting collections of types any director has had to handle in a long time. In his direction he ably keeps the story in the mood its visual elements create. By virtue of its lack of big box-office names, Swing Your Lady will not be rated among the important Warner productions, but none on the season's program could be made more honestly than this one. It is a hillbilly story which sticks to its business of being hillbilly and puts on no city airs. Enright's

direction has the essential quality of conviction, makes us believe we are viewing hillbilly life as it is. Producer Bishoff has provided an authentic setting which makes the picture visually interesting. The performances are excellent, that of Miss Fazenda being outstanding. The four city men are played by Humphrey Bogart, Frank McHugh, Allen Jenkins and Nat Pendleton. For once we do not have Bogart as a heavy, although as manager of a professional wrestler he is not adverse to practicing all the tricks of the trade. Penny Singleton sings and dances pleasingly and reveals a personality which would make her a favorite, but she should cultivate a more musical talking voice. Arthur Edeson's photography is well up to his high standard, and the film editing of Jack Killifer, especially in the long wrestling sequence, is a skilful piece of work. A most interesting and rhythmic ensemble dance staged by the efficient and artistic Bobby Connolly is one of the high spots of the picture. Music plays a big part in the production. I will leave that to Bruno Ussher to discus in a later Spectator.

MAUCH TWINS AND A DOG . . .

● PENROD AND HIS TWIN BROTHER; Warners production and release; Bryan Foy, associate producer; directed by William McGann; screen play by William Jacobs and Hugh Cummings; based on Penrod stories by Booth Tarkington; assistant director, Sherry Shourds; dialogue director, Hugh Cummings; photography, Arthur Todd; film editor, Doug Gould; art director, Hugh Reticker. Cast: Billy Mauch, Bobby Mauch, Frank Craven, Spring Byington, Charles Halton, Claudia Coleman, Jackie Morrow, Philip Hurlic, Bennie Bartlett, Bernice Pilot, John Pirrone, Billy Lechner, Charles Foy, Charles Jordan, Jay Adler, Max Wagner, Eddie Collins, Fred Lawrence, Cliff Soubier, Robert Homans, Eddie Chandler, Jack Mower, Billy Wolfstone, Jerry Madden, Ernie Wechbaugh, Donald Hulbert, Jerry Tucker, Jack Cunningham.

WARNER BROTHERS seem to have something here. Identical twins offer opportunities for Identical twins offer opportunities for enough comedy situations to supply a long series of pictures of the sort Bryan Foy intends to make. The visual effect of identical twins always has been easy to accomplish by means of double-exposure photography, but it lacked conviction as a story element, being accepted merely as an amusing trick in which the public soon lost interest. But the Mauch twins are different. Being genuine, identical, nice boys and capable actors, they soon should attract a large following if presented in pictures not quite so loosely put together as this first joint starring venture. Penrod and His Twin Brother is not aptly named, the boys not being presented as twins, not even as being related. A fact the audience cannot be asked to accept as an excuse for the weakness of the story, is that the script was written originally for one boy and the other was injected as an after-thought. The script reveals the scar of the incision which was made to put the second boy in, the appearance of the second being delayed too long, but, even so, the complications are highly amusing when the two are brought together.

Little Dog, Little Corporal . . .

CAPABLE cast was provided for the picture, but A the most brilliant member of it is a little dog. Duke by name, indeterminate as to breed, but seemingly possessing the combined intelligence of all the breeds which participated in the long line of indiscriminate romances of which he is the ultimate result. Duke is a zestful canine, reflecting a sense of humor and much determination. He really is the hero of the story by virtue of being its motivating element. There are also a group of youngsters, two indulgent parents, policemen, gangsters and whatnot. In spite of its loose construction and a plethora of dialogue, the story will hold your attention and give you a pleasant hour's entertainment. As I viewed it, I thought what little difference it made whether the fate of a mongrel dog or the fate of a mighty nation was used to build suspense in a motion picture story. The thing of most importance to you at the moment is what is before your eyes. Duke is as important to Penrod as Napoleon is to Conquest. When the little dog escapes from the police officer who is taking him away from Penrod, you rejoice as much as you do when the hero foils the villain in a major dramatic epic. Of such appeals to the emotions are motion pictures made entertaining.

Hereafter Should Be Brothers . . .

NE of my screen loves, Spring Byington, plays Penrod's mother, and Frank Craven makes a most convincing father. In the future pictures in which the twins will appear the Lockharts, Kathleen and Gene, are to play the parents, and I hope Bryan Foy will make the twins brothers, as in this first picture it strains our credulity to accept the boys as total strangers to one another. Billy and Bobby are growing up, but they still are boys-will be for a few years—and they can be made big assets for Warners if they are given a series of human stories presented intelligently and with much less talk than we have to listen to as Penrod unwinds. But to the credit of the director is the fact that the talk is easy to listen to, all the dialogue being delivered in conversational tones instead of being shouted at us as it still is in so many pictures. I know of nothing else which reveals the ignorance of a director as emphatically as does the too loud reading of lines in scenes in which characters merely are conversing in what should be a natural and unemotional manner. Foy gave Penrod a satisfactory setting, and you can spend a pleasant



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CHRONICAL CONTINUES . . .

● LOVE ON A BUDGET; 20th-Fox picture and release; associate producer, Max Golden; directed by Herbert I. Leeds; screen play by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; based on the characters created by Katharine Kavanaugh; photographed by Edward Snyder; art direction by Bernard Herzbrun and Chester Gore; film editor, Harry Reynolds; costumes by Helen A. Myron; sound by George P. Costello and William H. Anderson; musical direction by Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jed Prouty, Shirley Deane, Spring Byington, Russell Gleason, Kenneth Howell, George Ernest, June Carlson, Florence Roberts, Billy Mahan, Alan Dinehart, Dixie Dunbar, Marvin Stephens, Paul Harvey, Joyce Compton.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

NOTHER episode in the saga of the Jones Family A is told in Love On A Budget, which centers around the domestic trials and tribulations of the newlyweds Bonnie and Herbert. The other members of the family have conspicuous parts in the tale, however, each taking up his existence on the screen at approximately the same point at which it was left by the closing of the last film of the series. Love On A Budget is not as strong in the way of story material as most of the earlier films have been. Some of the characters are handled rather arbitrarily now and then, and there does not seem time for quite as much commentary on American small-town life, which has been amusing and sometimes significantly critical in the past. But followers of the Jones Family will find its members as distinctly drawn and as animated as ever. They are a likable crew and one finds himself following their fortunes with interest even though he would take issue with some of the things they are called upon to do.

Are Too Easily Beguiled . . .

DESULTORY Uncle Charlie complicates the lives of the characters in this episode, and he unfortunately complicates them a bit too much for conviction. It is not easy to believe that young Herbert, who operates a florist shop, would let himself be drawn into debt to the point of ruin by the unctuous wiles of Uncle Charlie. Nor is it easy to believe that Bonnie could be persuaded to order a house full of new furniture by the unctuous one, especially considering that her husband has been dead set against the purchase of any new furniture. Russell Gleason seems to have made some slight change in his concept of Herbert since the last picture, but possibly his present meekness and gullibility are necessitated by the beguilement of the uncle. Most of his comedy points are well handled, though he has a tendency toward stiffness in several scenes. Shirley Deane manages the diverse moods of her part capably. The other members of the family have been commented upon in earlier reviews. All are in good form. Notable work is done again by young Marvin Stephens, a recent addition to the group, who contributes a deft bit of comedy. Herbert Leeds, doing an initial job of direction, seems to have grasped the qualities of his characters very well. Most of his

scenes are of a smooth texture, with an easy movement of the people. Only in a few shots was there a need for greater motion. His climax, in a burning building, had punch and showed good planning. Robert Ellis and Helen Logan were the scriptists. Competent editing has been done by Harry Reynolds and the photography of Edward Snyder is standard.

FIVE AUTHORS IN SEARCH OF STORY . . .

● LOVE IS A HEADACHE; Metro picture and release; produced by Frederick Stephani; directed by Richard Thorpe; screen play by Marion Parsonnet, Harry Ruskin, William R. Lipman, Lou Heifetz, Herbert Klein; musical score by Edward Ward; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art direction by Cedric Gibbons, in association with Joseph Wright and Edwin B. Willis; gowns by Adrian; film editor, Conrad A. Nervig; assistant director, Tom Andre. Cast: Gladys George, Franchot Tone, Ted Healy, Mickey Rooney, Frank Jenks, Ralph Morgan, Virginia Weidler, Jessie Ralph, Fay Holden, Barnett Parker, Julius Tannen.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

TIVEN Franchot Tone, Gladys George, Ted Healy, Grank Jenks, Mickey Rooney, Virginia Weidler, Ralph Morgan and Jessie Ralph, direction by Richard Thorpe and gowns by Adrian, with an MGM production budget under the supervision of Producer Frederick Stephani, and the spectator might expect a good motion picture. Instead he gets a rather fumbling and somewhat unbelievable yarn about an actress, and a hammy one at that, who adopts two kids and is thereby regenerated, rejuvenated and reunited to the man she really loves. Evidently the melange presented in the combined efforts of Marion Parsonnet, Harry Ruskin, William R. Lipman, Lou Heifetz and Herbert Klein was no little headache for Richard Thorpe, who directed one of the finest pictures of last year, Night Must Fall. For the reason that five heads are rarely as good as one when it comes to screen writing, Love Is a Headache never gets going, and would not have got anywhere if it did. All the performers give their best in a hardy attempt to make the story breathe, but no go. The story moves woodenly to its inexorable climax—a shotgun marriage between Franchot Tone and Gladys George which was not amusing because of the things it gave a really capable actress like Jessie Ralph to do as a sheriff.

Hollywood Is a Headache . . .

ALTHOUGH the credit sheet and the screen billing definitely stipulate that "the events . . . living or dead is purely coincidental" we would like to bet that we know who Franchot Tone is supposed to be: A radio gossip who addresses open letters of the air and hopes to salvage the souls of downfallen stage and screen artists. That he should have been construed to be such a lily-bearer in the picture seems almost a mild acceptance of that type of radio gossip artist which has been making life difficult for Hollywood stars and studios. In short, Franchot Tone is represented as a drama editor and gossip monger whose campaign to improve his friends is Galahadized in the present instance.

Mickey Rooney Is the Hero . . .

THE kids walk off with this one with Frank Jenks pretty nearly upsetting the apple cart. Mickey Rooney and Virginia Weidler take everything that is not nailed, and show the adult performers how it is done. Gladys George, MGM shall have found out by this time, cannot act in light roles in the current screwball cycle. She is a dramatic actress and cannot be forced on the public as anything else. Her rather Mae Westian coiffure and gowning were disconcerting.

KIDS DID NOT LIKE IT . . .

● HAWAIIAN BUCKAROO; Principal Productions; released by Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation: produced by Sol Lesser; directed by Ray Taylor; original story and screen play by Dan Jarrett; photography by Allen Thompson; art direction by Ralph Berger; musical supervisor, Abe Meyer; assistant director, V. O. Smith; sound technician, L. John Myers; film editor, Bert Jordan. Cast: Smith Ballew, Evalyn Knapp, Benny Burt, Harry Woods, Pat O'Brien, George Regas, Laura Treadwell, Carl Stockdale, Snowflake.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

THE Italian poet Dante must have been thinking of the neighborhood playhouse on a Saturday afternoon when he visioned his Inferno-because when the local kids get together for a feast of Westerns, shorts and serials, hell breaks loose in all its forms. It was for this kid reaction, no doubt, that Producer Sol Lesser tried out Hawaiian Buckaroo in Culver City's Meralta Theatre, which caters to a popcorn and all-day-sucker clientele, on Saturday afternoon. And the reaction was, unfortunately, not one of the best. Beware when kids leave their seats during a show to get a glass of water or to run up and down the aisles or to visit Red Slattery who is sitting way up front. That means that what is going on on the screen does not hold much interest. And the present offering is in that category. There is one cafe brawl and one cross-country chase at the very end—the rest is interminable dialogue, and bad dialogue to boot. The fault is unquestionably with the script, which should have been punched with much more action.

Direction Is Good . . .

RAY TAYLOR has given the picture good direction and an unusual amount of footage for a picture of this sort. As a matter of fact, Hawaiian Buckaroos is one of the longest Westerns I ever have seen. As indicated previously, most of the footage is concerned with dialogue. Evalyn Knapp gives a good performance. I have seen her in other pictures of this category and I personally feel that she is not beyond handling better roles. George Regas does good work as a heavy. Smith Ballew can sing but he is much too stiff before the camera. Although Gene Autrey, Number One Cowboy, sings, too, I do not believe that singing goes over so hot with the juvenile fans unless there is a lot of snappy action to boot. The rest of the cast did not seem fully conversant with camera technique and some of the lines were read in almost textbook fashion.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

ND still the Phantom of the Opera is stalking the A highways and by-ways of Hollywood. I tried to lay this ghost in last week's Spectator music page, but now I notice the restless being is looking over Welford Beaton's shoulder while he occupies editorially his Easy Chair. Sleepwalking Lady Macbeth cannot have rubbed her hands more anxiously, as studio officials and film critics ruminate nebulously about film opera. Editor Beaton, who always takes pride in assuring me that he would not know a fugue when he heard one, must have been in communion with the wraith I mentioned, causing him to make the most pertinent remarks (barring my own, of course, of last week) on this subject: The Omnipotents Look At Opera. By Omnipotents I mean those two or three individuals in any studio, who can buy screen rights from an opera publisher, can command a director, scenarists and composers (necessary evils) to go into a huddle to cinematize a given work. Shall I say, lifting opera's face filmically? W. B.'s comments about opera are well taken. Most opera is badly stage-managed and acted frightfully. Opera is still "caviar" for many, even to the habitual wearers of "fish and soup." It still is too expensive for the masses. But, as the occupant of the Easy Chair opines, opera cannot be bodily transplanted onto the screen. The only result would be failure.

Opera Is Drama . . .

PERA is drama, or, at least, it should be. Who Ocan count the instances when the well-meaning librettist has become the grave-digger for his collab-orator, the composer? That story of artistic homicide is more than three hundred years old, as ancient as the beginnings of opera. Opera is drama. Richard Wagner, who was not only capable of writing his own librettos, also filled volume upon volume of theoretic writings on this subject. And still the musician in him quite often galloped away with the librettist in him tied to the tail of his tonal Pegasus. Wagner's dramatic spirit was willing, but his musical flesh was weak. His music is dramatic, of course; at times more dramatic on the concert stage than in the opera house. At any rate, he was wise enough to make his intentions clear by replacing the designation "opera" with the term "music-drama", emphasizing the second word. But that is a well-established fact and does not need recounting here and now. Metro is acting along this line by having an operatic stage manager of William Wymetal's experience make practical, music-dramatic test scenes with the singers on the lot. Opera is drama, and its equivalent on the screen cannot dispense with action and drama. Whether said drama be gay or sad, it still must be drama expressed through action.

Accent on Action . . .

LTHOUGH Los Angeles paid \$100,000 a few A weeks ago in order to attend five opera performances, the mere term opera causes some people an attack of gooseflesh. Some have been driven away from enjoying this art by dramatically-scenically bad performances, to say nothing of frequently unconvincing, and worse, inadequate singing; while others suffer from the great American inferiority complex when it comes to enjoying a great performance of opera or symphony. The less the screen world uses the word "opera", the less prejudice of one or the other kind will have to be overcome. Whatever the shape and term (name the child after it is born) for this coming sound film species, it should not be opera in the sense conveyed by the conventional implication of the word. Conventional opera consists of a variety of arias or numbers for one or more persons, who give a miniature costume recital, accompanied by arm movements and change of foot posture. This sort of business has proven fatal during more than one instance of screen entertainment, known by the curiously vacuous noun of a musical. In short, accent must be on action.

Choice of Approach . . .

HAVE no intention of repeating at length what I have pointed out last week about so-called film opera, written on the spot for that purpose. Of course, given the money (a wagon load), more than one composer will turn Abraham, tie his muse to the altar of his bank account and perform the grisly ritual prestissimo. But few great operas were written in a hurry, and then only in the spreading fire of pressing inspiration. Even the most ready-to-start composer needs time, the librettist needs time before him, to say nothing of the producer-director, who must find a vocal-dramatic cast, i.e., find out how much of this hasty-pastry can be put on celluloid. No. It will be necessary to think in terms of music-drama, in terms of a modern Wagner who has learned from his mistakes and self-indulgences as a philosopher. Meeting William Wymetal, MGM's music-dramatic chief investigator, at one of the Salzburg Opera Guild performances, the subject of the hour came up inevitably. We agreed that this new sound film must be either a loan from the existing repertoire of the lyric stage, but suitably adjusted for the screen, this being music most closely allied with a play, or it could be a play on a definitely musical theme and thus again organically justifying use of much music.

Rhythmic Intonation . . .

HAVING taken for granted that we had found a cinematically suitable drama (a naturally moving play, whether tragedy or comedy, preferably sufficiently modern, true to life today), we further assumed that the studio had in the meantime assembled

a nucleus of singers who could act before the camera, who were convincing of histrionic-vocal expression. Having settled this additional problem before the curtain rose again on the excellent actor-singers from Austria, we left further deliberation for the time being. On the way to the auto park we settled on the name, screen-music-drama. We did not yet fully eliminate the problem of action-halting arias. But we had come independently to the same conclusion that a flexible modification of what Wagner called Sprech-Gesang or speech-song would have to be developed in accordance with the dramatic character of the subject. I believe Mr. Wymetal liked the term I manufactured at random: Rhythmic Intonation. It would be a natural form of musical speech which would melodically draw more on the chief melodic ideas of the whole work than the conventional opera recitative, thus avoiding the monotony of expression enforced by that outmoded procedure. Our rhythmic intonation would be a naturally expressive form of declamation. By which time we parted for home in different directions.

Love and Hisses . . .

REALLY this 20th Century-Fox production might be called *Hisses and Love*, for all is well and lovely in the end. But the reason for the title being as it reads, is quite obvious. As far as the singing Simone Simon in Love and Hisses goes, it justifies both loving and hissing, at least, so to speak. As the Spectator preview has revealed, it is one of those faststepping, bright nonsense, laugh films. Walter Winchell appears in person; is shown at the mike telling the world what it should know and think of his high-pitched staccato manner of speech. Mack Gordon and Harry Revel, responsible for music and lyrics, culminating in four ballads, have adopted to some extent the Winchellian crackle and tempo. These are engaging songs, pleasingly simple, but they do not engage one's attention very long. Arrangements are of the prevailing stock-in-trade variety. Something really clever could have been done by way of instrumentation during the dance of three hefty Hawaiian belles. It is the kind of number which fetched quite a bit of preview chuckles when three corpulent mamies did a specialty in Eddie Cantor's Ali Baba Goes to Town not so long ago. I like musical fun, and I like it still better if it is witty and ingenious, without putting Stravinsky into the circus ring.

Lily Should Beware . . .

I HAD the feeling that Simone Simon had her tongue in her cheek, metaphorically and actually, when as a little French girl singer, she too invades New York City of the floorshow world. Of course, it is possible that the idea was aborned first by the story brain trusters under Darryl Zanuck's command, before RKO had Lily Pons try Hitting a New High. The star of Love and Hisses sings with excellent intonation, and surprisingly lovely tone, a few bars from what I believe to have been taken out of Delibes' Lahme. I would gladly stand corrected if the

music director, Louis Silvers, suggested that Editor Beaton buy me a score of Rimsky-Korsakoff's Coq d'Or as a belated Christmas gift. At this writing, however, I doubt whether the always generous editor of the Spectator will be put to such expense. In any case, I do not claim infallible memory. Indeed, Simone Simon possesses uncommonly lovely vocal means, although she does not always use them well. I am not prepared to say that the position of her head has affected tone quality. She may not have inclined her head sideways when recording. Some French artists have a tendency to throaty speaking and singing voices. That may be a colloquialism more than anything. Simone Simon suffers from such a habit and that is a pity.

Operatic Material . . .

IF SOMEONE were to make a film version of Offenbach's Tales of Hoffman, Simone Simon would present a perfect picture of Olympia, the doll, and, properly applied, her voice should allow her to negotiate this role. Moreover, she sounds musical and secure of intonation. I really have no reason to believe that Simone Simon is after the laurels of Lily Pons, but there were vocal and visual similitudes worth remembering. More than tail-end mention is really due Dick Baldwin, for a warm-toned, clean, sympathetic ballad singing. It was no great occasion to judge the young man's singing talents, but sufficient to hope for worthwhile possibilities. All this, to hear Simone Simon produce tone of which a Lily Pons could make good use, to find in the same film a well-substantiated voice by a manly looking fellow minus operatic fat in the midriff, is most encouraging when ginger-fingered producers speculatively lift the lid of the operatic box of Pandora.

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RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD

ot MABEL KEEFER

OF COURSE, I am only an old maid living in a small city, but we who live in the smaller towns and cities are potential motion picture patrons, and after all, what the film industry needs is more patrons. . . . That makes us rather important, doesn't it? . . . And our likes and dislikes must count in the long run. . . . Now, I wonder if there is box-office authority for producers using Broadway as a criterion of the cinematic taste of the country as a whole? . . . If there is, then, of course, I can't argue the matter. . . . Wonder how I can find out if there are any facts and figures to prove that as Broadway goes, so goes the amusement loving public of the nation?

WHAT I want to know: Is there anything that it takes that Jeanette MacDonald hasn't got? . . . And how much of the music being written today will have the delightful freshness twenty-five years from now, that the music Friml wrote twenty-five years ago has today?

THERE must be something screwy about the prevailing methods of advertising pictures. . . . Five of the most entertaining pictures I have seen this year were so badly advertised that I should have missed seeing them if I had not read the Spectator reviews. . . . When I speak of having enjoyed any one of the pictures included in this group, my friends look at me in surprise and say, "Why was that a good picture? I didn't think I'd like it!" . . . Wonder if there isn't a tendency to make a play for a certain type of customer—real or imagined—and to ignore the rest of us? . . . My small-town opinion is that it might pay to look into this matter of advertising. . . There seems to be too much ballyhoo for the big pictures, and not enough build-up—or at least the right kind of build-up—for others that deserve it.

READ somewhere that Agricultural Department experts say that radio music is conducive to barnyard harmony; that it makes for contented cows, more gentle horses, satisfied fowl. That is—they say—it does if the music doesn't happen to be of the "hi-de-ho, hot-cha-cha" variety. . . . Now, if someone will only discover that humans would be a lot more contented if they didn't listen to so much "hi-de-ho, hot-cha-cha" music.

THAT delightful rhythmic treat in Firefly, "The Donkey's Serenade," keeps running through my head. . . . Heard of several people who stayed to see the second run of that part of the picture, and I

know why. The lilt of the music—the joyous notes of the piping in their ears; the dancing boy and the dashing horseman before their eyes; an aural and visual combination sure to put a lilt in the souls of the people in the audience. . . . Good medicine! . . . But I suppose the executives of the film industry "do not envision themselves" as doctors.

WHAT IS IT—? (Business of humming.)

"With banners streaming, His good sword gleaming, A knight came riding,

Once upon a time. . . ."

I know! Peggy Wood in *The Clinging Vine*, singing "Once Upon a Time." What a clever performance she gave, and what a good musical comedy it was—sparkling with fun. . . And such likable music. . . . Why doesn't some producer present *The Clinging Vine* on the screen? . . . It needs a good director and a good cast, but it does not need a stupendous amount of money.

THE gravure section of a recent issue of the New York Herald-Tribune carries an air view of Coney Island, with a notation that included among Park Commissioner Moses' plans for improvement of this beach resort one to "subordinate noisy mechanical entertainment." Film industry, please copy.

CAW a musical short last night. . . . Horrible! . . . Leaving the matter of the quality of the music ("some likes it and some doesn't") out of it entirely, the directing was terrible. . . . At least it would seem that bad directing must be responsible for the stiff, stilted performances and sappy facial expressions of the young people in the cast.... Presumably pictures of that sort are supposed to appeal to the young people in the theatre audience.... This morning talked with an office associate, a lad of twenty-one. ... We agreed that the feature picture (The Great Garrick) was great, and that the Disney cartoons always had delighted music. . . . Waited hopefully to see if he would say anything about the musical short, being tremendously interested in youth's opinion of it.... When it came it was short, but not sweet-"Putrid!" he said.... We agreed about that, too.

SENSE of Humor Held Close Kin to Intelligence!" That is a newspaper headline that should attract a great deal of attention, but probably won't.... The article tells of an address given by Winifred H. Nash, of Boston, before the National Council of Teachers of English, in Buffalo, New York, in which she said that experiments showed, "high intelligence and a lively sense of humor usually go together." Miss Nash stressed the point that cultivation of a student's sense of humor was more vital than rules for the use of the comma, and that "insofar as a pupil fails to understand humor, he fails also to understand life situations and to interpret character."

of humor has to do with the muddle in Europe? . . . Just how significant is it that the peace-loving nations are the ones who cultivate what someone has called the "sanity-promoting art" of laughing at themselves? . . . And what better medium for emphasizing that idea than the screen? . . . Oh dear! I forgot that the executives of the film industry "do not envision themselves as teachers." . . . Anyway, I don't believe it! . . . Surely there are some who recognize the power of suggestion, and that the screen teaches, whether pictures are made with that thought in mind or not. . . And speaking of a sense of humor, or rather, the lack of it: What a pity it would be not to be able to enjoy the whimsicality of Editor Beaton's Mental Meanderings. . . . But I must admit that my sense of humor is badly strained when he mentions "one of Mrs. Spectator's lemon pies," and I realize the miles between me and that

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

AND I DO MEAN "WHEW!" . . .

LOT of money is \$250,000. Probably the A largeness of the sum demanded by Constance Bennett in her suit against Jimmie Fidler and his sponsors can be attributed to the legal tradition that a plaintiff is to collect only a portion of the damages he asks for. At any rate, if Miss Bennett has a valid case, I hope she collects her due portion. It would be a milestone in the freeing of motion picture players from the hazards of detrimental publicity at the hands of radio and press gossipers. Apparently the producers are either too unimaginative or wary to take any concerted action against the gossiping practice, despite that it evidently does incalculable harm to the industry. The winning of a personal suit, however, would set a valuable precedent, one which would encourage other individuals to seek redress against those who injure their professional standing by false gossip or even true gossip that is none of the public's business. Most statutes, I believe it will be found, do not allow that truth of an assertion is necessarily an excuse for its publication.

It's the Same Old Story . . .

FIDLER'S contention that the public is interested in the lives of Hollin the lives of Hollywood people and therefore should have its fill of such gossip, is an argument as old as the beginnings of newspaper publication. Applied to the lives of ordinary citizens it has been used by every yellow sheet that ever came into existence. Advanced journalists, however, hold that only such news as the public is entitled to know should be disseminated, and what people are entitled to know is any information which in any way helps them to adjust themselves to the life about them.

Little news about the private lives of others comes into this category. All of us would like to know some things about our neighbors that are none of our business. The mere fact that we would like to know them does not entitle us to know them. Our social advancement as a race is based upon our placing deliberate limitations upon our individual desires for the good of the body politic. That, in essence, is what all law does. Suppose Lady Godiva suddenly came cantering down the street on her horse. If you think I wouldn't look, you're greatly mistaken. Yet I should be the last to maintain that she should be there.

Appeals to the Ignoble ...

THIS is not intended to imply that intelligent lis-I teners take any great interest in Fidler's slush. Some persons can always be found, however, who are curious about the pettiest and most unsavory details of others' lives, just as persons can be found to patronize the most licentious burlesque theatres or to purchase narcotics. Evidently it is a minority group of listeners with such curiosity that encourage Fidler in his petty comments through letters to him. The pity of the situation is that Fidler has much to say that would interest intelligent listeners. He has shown shrewd observation of the motion picture business at numerous times when he has spoken along such lines.

VIOLENCE IS THREATENED . . .

DRODUCERS and exhibitors beware! I have sworn to create some public disturbance the very next time a hero suddenly goes "boo" in the face of the villain and the latter proceeds to be startled into a momentary St. Vitus dance, which is supposed to confirm the idea that the hero is a very clever, self-possessed and courageous fellow, and the villain a jittery, yellow-bellied rat. The number of times I have seen this masterly stroke of wit in recent films cannot be recounted, but its effect on my nervous system is telling. I am no Tarzan, but I can let out a resounding whoop, and hats I bash with great gusto.

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CAMERA ANGLES

By Robert Joseph

FAIR PLAY, ENGLISH COUSINS! . .

FROM ACROSS the waters in a recent issue of London's The Daily Film Renter, a motion picture trade paper, comes the following anent MGM's Navy Blue and Gold: "Here is a film designed mainly for the edification of the American patron, to whom the great naval academy of Annapolis is a pride and joy, and the local ball-game (hyphen theirs,) a positive riot. Picturegoers on this side, however, are apt to be embarrassed by the sickly sentiment of Uncle Sam's embryo admirals, to say nothing of being completely bewildered by the free-forall indulged in by hefty giants on the playing fields." Action on the "playing fields" refers to our own football game, the Army-Navy Classic. Now I can understand British bewilderment at the spectacle of American football, for I have a very difficult time explaining the game to Mehitabel, my favorite dumb blonde girl friend. But The Renter is not playing cricket, if you will pardon the double entente. I have seen British pictures in which rugby had a prominent part, and I am still confused as to what it is all about. I remember, in particular, a Will Hay comedy which featured such a sequence. I respected the enthusiasm and the do-or-die spirit of both teams, although I had not the slightest idea of what they were about. International respect for each other's national games or not, I cannot appreciate something I cannot understand. So this suggestion does not seem amiss. When America exports a Navy Blue and Gold, a Pigskin Parade, a Hold 'Em Navy -in short, any feature picture with long football sequences, let the game be cut to an essential last-minute minimum. We may ask England to pay the war debt; but we cannot insist that it learn the intricacies of our national sport. In the same way, let England pare down its athletic contests, so that they will not seem any more ludicrous than we.

Respect of Tradition . . .

THE OTHER charge of embarrassment due to sickly sentiment is a little more serious. No doubt, our "service" pictures are in the main Adam's apple addlers. They pluck at our sentimental sleeves until the tears come. But like it or not these pictures depict something of our love for tradition. Personally, and parenthetically, I believe that many of these "service" pictures that lubricate our tear ducts are purely and harmfully jingoistic. Be that as it may, in some small measure they represent our patriotic sentiments and should have the courtesy of foreign respect. I saw London Film's Troop Ship some time ago, and when members of the high-brow preview audience laughed at some "dear old England" scenes, a Britisher in the row immediately in front of me turned on my tittering girl friend Mehitabel and said,

"voung lady. I think you are both stupid and rude. That nonsense to you means something to me." So you see, Film Renter, fair is foul and foul is fair.

HOW NOW, HOLLYWOOD? . . .

HENEVER Washington Congressional sessions get terribly dull and there are few important bills pending before the House or Senate, some congressman or senator, taking time off from his legislative duties, reads a movie magazine and discovers that Joan Crawford and Clark Gable make many times his salary. His answer to their greater earning capacity, in spite of his greater importance to the American public, is to initiate a bill to soak Hollywood. The soaking takes varied forms. Sometimes a tax on theatre tickets. Sometimes a tax on salaries. Sometimes a tax on celluloid footage. The most recent soak was an attempt to make Hollywood a taxable scapegoat, had to do with juvenile players and the Child Labor Amendment. In other words, soaking Hollywood is a kind of cylic part of Washington legislation. When cigarettes, liquor, millionaires and gasoline have just about stood the brunt of federal taxation, Hollywood is in line for its inning. But there is a deep and far-reaching reason why Hollywood is periodically made a tax football and is eyed as a celluloid bonzana to keep congressional pork barrels full. And there is a way to make Hollywood something more important than a target for taxminded politicians.

Again, What Is the Screen? . . .

INFORTUNATELY, Washington has a misguided view of the position of motion pictures in American life. Many congressmen take seriously pronunciamentos like Martin Quigley's anent the purpose of motion pictures. To paraphrase the publisher and spokesman, the only purpose of films is to entertain. Now in these dire times of depression and recession, forms of entertainment are in fact and substance a luxury. There is no valid reason, in the eyes of even the most liberal and fair-minded members of Congress, why those who can afford luxuries should not work in some measure for our nation's recovery. Those who pay for luxuries must assist those who starve for necessities. No matter what our economic ideologies or positions, that arrangement seems equitable. And as long as Congress is convinced that motion pictures are merely entertainment, and therefore a luxury, it is not for Hollywood to raise the cry of unfair taxation and Congressional prejudice against Hollywood. Nor is it at all amiss that motion pictures should be the object of sometimes unfair and often excessive taxation. We are thus driven to the inexorable conclusion that Mr. Quigley's tirades against Washington are neither logical nor fair.

Ringing Challenge to Congress . . .

MOWEVER, let us imagine for a moment that Hollywood's answer to Washington's repeated attempts to tax is this: Motion pictures are not merely entertainment; they are a social force! They educate!

They liberate the spirit! They make for American progress! American thinking! They make us conscious of our own shortcomings! Like school and college training, they are an educational necessity! Then the film is lifted out of the realm of entertainment and raised to a level of Social Awareness. Films thus take a predominant part in our nation's social, political, religious, cultural and educational amelioration. In other words, if Washington can be forced to recognize that the neolithic era of the nickelodeon and peep show is over, that motion pictures are no longer merely "escapes," then the film becomes a social necessity instead of Saturday night entertainment in the same class with the corner saloon and the poker game in the back of the delicatessen. Every year the Hay's office report repeats the self-same conclusion: motion pictures have grown up. But they have not, in the eyes of Washington solons, because of the widely publicized statements of the alleged spokesman of the screen, Quigley, and many of his unthinking partisans.

TEN PICTURES THAT SHOOK—NOTHING . . .

WHEN film critics are receiving salvos and slams for their selections of this year's Ten Best, why not a list of the screen's ten most disappointing pictures? The only purpose to a list of this sort is not the opportunity to wise-crack at the expense of many a greying producer and director, but an attempt to show what makes a critic tick the way he does. The reward for those who discover the mainspring of such criticism is the opportunity to see to it he never sees any of their pictures again. Anyway, here listed are the pictures which disappointed me the most during the past year.

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picture for which Editor Welford Beaton has been asking for almost a year. Instead, this film was an emasculated version of Remarque's powerful theme of war futility. Technically and dramatically the picture was a good one; thematically a keen disappointment to those who waited for two things: a worthy successor to All Quiet; a powerful preachment against war. The final montage was a nice evasion. The most disappointing picture of the year because it fell so far short of what it might have been. High Wide and Handsome because even a suicidal budget could not save it from being a cinematic hodgepodge of everything imaginable. What might have been another Cimarron turned out to be a loosely made musical—and a bad one, at that. Blossoms on Broadway for the things it made Edward Arnold do, for a lack of plot unity, for bad direction and bad acting, for general unsteadiness and complete pointlessness. Knight in Armour for being one of the year's most rambling stories, for lowering Robert Donat's stock, for such an unfair presentation of revolutionary miscreants and White Army boy scouts. Last of Mrs. Cheney for not being the last of Mrs. Cheyney, and for being the most talkie-talkie picture of the year. Sing While You're Able for being the most poorly edited film of the year, and for being the story which had the least plot of any of the list. Federal Bullets for lacking imagination, passable direction, proper lighting, and acceptable acting. For a complete lack of closeups and for general production shoddiness. Angel for being a picture of fragile beauty without warmth and without a soul. Not even the fine performance of the principals gave this picture a purpose. Wine, Women and Horses for being too much like Dark Hazard, and for attempting to pass as something new.

The Road Back because it might have been the

Oh, yeah! Well, check the box-office receipts of each and see. Bad pictures make for bad box-office.

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Twelfth Year

Los Angeles, California—February 5, 1938

Vol. 12-No. 33

Guilds Doing Good Work

Actors' Organization Still Faces a Big Task
In Forcing Film Producers to be More
Considerate of the Welfare of
Supporting Players

汉汉

Bruno Ussher . . . Bert Harlen . . . Robert Joseph Mabel Keefer . . . F. Hugh Herbert

汉汉

... REVIEWS ...

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One of the interesting things about this writer's letter was that his name was not on our subscription list and never had appeared in our advertising columns—that he never had spent one dime in support of the paper he valued so highly.

I called upon him and explained that I wanted to analyze him. First—where did he get the Spectator he read with profit to himself? Each week he picked it up in one of the offices along the corridor.

Why had he never advertised in it? No one had asked him to. But he'd give me an ad right now. I told him I had come to take him apart, not to sell him anything, that as a type he interested me.

The writer I quote acknowledges that the Spectator has been of value to him. It never had occurred to him that he could be of value to the Spectator, that his check for a subscription would be helpful.

I suppose there are several hundred other film writers, directors, players, technicians, producers to whom it has not occurred that the Spectator would appreciate their substantial support, who intend to give it such support, but who never get around to it. Do you happen to be one of them?

There is a subscription coupon on page 12 and our telephone always is available for information about advertising rates.—W. B.

CONTRACTS HAVE TO EXPIRE . . .

THE full effect of the action of the Screen Writers' I and Screen Actors' Guilds in asking their members to cease advertising in Hollywood Reporter and Daily Variety, will not become apparent in those publications for some months to come. Various screen people have signed contracts to take certain amounts of advertising in Reporter and Variety over periods of considerable length, and not until those contracts expire will the full effect of the guilds' action be apparent. The request of the guilds was, in effect, that their members should refrain from signing any more contracts with the two offending papers. The Spectator makes this explanation at the individual request of two directors and one writer whose advertisements have appeared in Variety or Reporter or both since the guild took action. Those making the requests did not wish to be put in the light of having disregarded the action of the guilds of which they are members and of whose action they wholly approve.*

*Since the paragraph was put in type, the Spectator has received several similar requests from directors and writers, as well as from four actors, even though the Actors' Guild, as far as we know, has made no request to its members to cease advertising in Reporter and Variety.

GUILDS DOING GOOD WORK . . .

ENCOURAGING signs of the times are the fact of the organization of the various film guilds and the manner in which they are being conducted. No leather-lunged agitators came to Hollywood and bellowed film people into uniting to protect their own interests. Only directors conduct the affairs of the Directors' Guild; the same is true of both Screen Writers' and Actors' Guilds. All three are being conducted wisely. And equally wisely is the Screen Playwrights being conducted. I am sorry the writers are divided into two camps, but that is their business, and not until the division affects the affairs of other craftsmen, have outsiders the right to poke their noses into the rift between the two factions. Such has been my policy and I have adhered to it so consistently that I am not even aware of the reasons for two organizations where to an outsider it would appear as if there should be one. An interesting feature of the government of all the organizations is its revelation

of the existence, in the ranks of all these creative artists, of a group of able executives in whose hands the welfare of the members is safe.

Fine Motive Back of Them . . .

 T^{HE} motive responsible for the organization of the groups is a worthy one. In each case the initiative was taken by craftsmen whose positions were secure, whose abilities assured them of the full consideration of those who employ them. They have come to the front, therefore, more to serve the interests of their less fortunately placed fellow craftsmen than to serve their own. Particularly is this true of the Actors' Guild which presents us with a picture of all the powerfully established stars uniting to be of service to supporting players and extras. Under the guidance of Kenneth Thompson and his able lieutenants, the Actors' Guild already has been of inestimable service to its members, and it barely has started on the great task confronting it. The film industry's disloyalty to players who have been loyal to it, is shocking to contemplate. Able actresses and actors who have demonstrated their ability in hundreds of parts they have played, are now on the verge of starvation, victims of the mistaken impression of producers that the public demands new faces—an impression born of the necessity for the producers to explain in some way why the pictures they make so stupidly do so poorly at the box-office.

Old Players Deserve Protection . . .

DURING the entire existence of the Spectator, now lengthening out into an impressive parade of years, it has pled the cause of the players whose homes are in Hollywood, whose families are being raised here, who have performed ably the tasks assigned to them, only in the end to be cast off by the employers they have served, to be replaced by imported players with whom the public is not familiar. Walking the streets of Hollywood today are a thousand human proofs of the fact—as I pointed out in the last Spectator—that producers are indifferent to the financial security of screen players, have no sense of obligation to those who have assisted in building the industry as a business and have made possible the enormous salaries the executives pay themselves. It is a situation the Actors' Guild should remedy. I suppose it intends to. I know nothing of its plans, have talked with none of its officers, but during a dozen years of close asso-

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ciation with picture making I have become cognizant of several ills the Guild should cure. Protecting the welfare of players old in service is but one of them.

Poor Deal for John Doe . . .

THE Call Bureau should be abolished. In theory it is a convenience to both studios and players; in practice it works to benefit the studios at the expense of the players. Studio A telephones the Bureau to send it a half-dozen players from whom it can select one to play a chauffeur for a couple of days. Among those sent is John Doe. While he is at A being considered for the work he needs so badly. studio B phones for Doe; it has a part for him. "A is interested in Doe," the Bureau replies. "Then send us Joe Doakes," says studio B. Finally at A someone else is selected for the part, and John Doe continues to be out of work. True, B could telephone to A and ask it if it intended to use Doe, but it does not do so. Players should be represented only by their agents, not by a soulless Call Bureau. And that brings up the question of agents. The Actors' Guild should draw a fine-tooth comb through the two hundred of them. There are a number of efficient, energetic and reputable players' representatives, but there also are a few score disreputable racketeers whom the Guild should blacklist.

One Evil to Be Remedied . . .

AND while it is at it, the Guild should devote attention to the ethics of some of the casting directors. To give John Doe more work in this discussion, even though he may not get much in studios, let us assume that during his long years of service he has established his weekly salary at \$300. A casting director sends for him, pleads with him that as the budget is about exhausted, there is not more than \$250 available to pay him for a week's work, that if he will cut his salary fifty dollars just this once there will be more work for him later at his established salary; that no one will know he cut it; "You know me, John; I'm strong for you, but if you'll do this for me, I'll keep mum about it and use you whenever I can." John Doe needs work; he has a wife and children; he accepts the cut. He goes directly from A to B studio where there is a part he may get to follow the one he signed for at A. When asked his salary by B and he states it, he is met with: "The hell you say! You've just signed with A for two-fifty. Take it or leave it." And thereafter the ploddingly established \$300 is re-established at \$250. Studio heads are not necessarily aware of the practice, of the close cooperation between casting directors in their shameless treatment of players. But the studio heads could look into it. And there is the instance of the minor player whose room rent I paid because he had lent what money he had to a casting director who had promised him work, but which he never got. Name and date available to Actors' Guild if it is interested.

Injustice of Farming-Out . . .

ONE thing, however, which studio heads do know about is the farming-out of contract players. In this paragraph we will give John Doe a job. He is

MEET MR. FREDERICK ROYSE

THE chances are good that if I had had any idea of the strenuous job to which I was assigning myself by changing the Spectator from a bi-weekly to a weekly, I might not have made the change. However, it is made, and I have been doing as well as I could with a two-man job while searching for another man to make two one-man jobs of it. I have found him in the person of Frederick Royse, a pleasant fellow with a long experience in all branches of the publishing business. As yet I have not figured out what to call him. Perhaps Personal Representative comes as near to describing him as anything else I can think of. In any event, his business is to scoot about and do various things I would do if I had the time, therefore, I hereby introduce him to the Spectator's friends, and hope those with whom he comes in contact will accept him as representing me and will extend him the same consideration it has been my good fortune to enjoy.

under contract to A at \$300 a week. B wants him; pays A \$500 a week for him; A pockets the extra \$200. The only reason B pays \$500 for Doe is that he is worth it; being worth it, he should get it himself. To me, the practice of making a profit by renting out players is about the lowest form of moneymaking. If Doe is worth \$500 to a producer who borrows him, he is worth that much to the producer to whom he is under contract, but if he has developed that value while under contract, he is entitled, during the life of the contract, only to the salary specified in it. When he is farmed out, his employer is entitled to some return on the salary paid while the player was idle, but all above a reasonable return should go to the farmed-out player. At all events, that is the policy of Sam Goldwyn. When another producer wants a Goldwyn star, Sam gets the highest possible price and gives it to the player. That is one of the reasons why Sam makes such good pictures. The people in them like to work for him. The question of working hours for both contract and free-lance players is something else which demands Guild attention; also the importation of foreign players to keep our homegrown ones out of work. The Guild should insist that a player must reside in Hollywood for at least six months before he can appear in a picture. If that does not stop the practice, the interim should be stretched to one year of continuous residence.

LOUD NOISE AND BAD TASTE . . .

WHY do we pick on the man in the projection booth when at a preview the sound is too loud? That is a question post-carded to us. It goes on to say that at most previews someone from the studio, most frequently the producer of the picture, controls the sound, manipulating it from a seat in the auditorium during the running of the film-not keeping the volume even, but making it rise and fall accord-

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ing to the manipulator's conception of the relation of sound to the meaning of each scene. Such being the case at some previews, I cheerfully withdraw the harsh things I said about projectionists in general and hereafter will try to locate the source of the annoyance before I place the blame. Loud noise, like a loud shirt, generally is the expression of the inherent vulgarity of the person responsible for it. A cinematic uproar, such as that which characterized the preview of Hollywood Hotel, annoys as much by the bad taste it displays as by the noise it makes.

C. B. AND PRODUCTION COSTS . . .

B. de MILLE comes a long way from suggesting C. a cure for the financial ills of the film industry when he says exhibitors will have to pay higher prices for the pictures they are to show in the future. He defends rising costs of production on the plea that the public demands pictures which cost a great deal of money. The greatest money-making picture last year, based on negative cost, was Saratoga; next came After the Thin Man, then The Awful Truth, all small pictures physically and costing very much less than, for instance, Paramount's sumptuously produced Artists and Models, which is in eighteenth place on the list which Saratoga heads. The whole history of motion pictures demonstrates that the audience prefers to have its emotions stirred rather than to have its visual sense stunned by the magnitude of what is shown it. It is no cure merely to pass onto exhibitors the absurdly excessive sums which producers spend in making pictures "for their own amazement," as Jack Warner so neatly puts it. Producers claim that this or that is "demanded" by the public, even though the public does not patronize it sufficiently to make its rental a profitable investment for the exhibitor.

Course in Cinematic Fundamentals . . .

THE greatest lesson producers can learn is available to them every afternoon and evening at the Carthay Circle Theatre. There Professor Walt Disney is conducting classes in Motion Picture Fundamentals. Snow White is a cinematic sermon, but I doubt if our producers are bright enough to profit by it. In New York it was necessary to open the great Music Hall at eight o'clock in the morning to accommodate the thousands of people anxious to see the Disney picture. It already has given the Carthay the biggest week's business in its history. It will gross more throughout the world than any other picture ever made. Why? Because it has in it everything the Spectator for a decade has been urging Hollywood to put into all its pictures. Scores of times the Spectator has urged the recognition of the first law of the screen art: There should be nothing on the screen which can be left to the imagination of the audience. Hollywood has proceeded in exactly the opposite direction, has striven to make its product factual, to make it aural instead of visual, to keep us in the real world instead of taking us out of it

and into a world of its own creation, as Disney does with his Snow White.

What Producers Can Do . . .

IIHAT Disney has done with fanciful drawings other producers can do with real people-they can inject in their pictures the same illusive feeling, can make the same appeal to the imagination, can provide complete musical scores, can supply the material with which the audience entertains itself. Snow White itself does not entertain us. It is too wildly absurd for that. It has box-office strength because it invites us to entertain ourselves with what it suggests, because it permits our imaginations to function to the point of our acceptance of what we see as real. Its simplicity is its greatest asset. It does not strive to stun us with its magnitude. All the sounds it records have musical quality, even the dialogue. I am aware its choice as the text for a sermon on economy in production can be challenged on the ground that it cost a lot of money to make. The greatest expense, however, was caused by the necessity of making so many drawings, each of which had to be photographed hundreds of times. The pictures of which exhibitors complain use human beings instead of drawings and photographing them is a continuous process. Hollywood today is spending more money than thought on its pictures. It would get farther if it would reverse the order.

WARNERS FINALLY CATCH UP . . .

YEARS ago I expended much literary energy in urging the film industry to consolidate its business by bringing all the head offices from New York to Hollywood. I thought then, and still think, it is absurd for the industry to have two headquarters as far apart as they could be without going aboard ships. Centralization of operations would make for greater efficiency and economy, and better understanding between the production, distributing and financial branches. But my energy was expended in vain. Nothing happened in spite of my thunderings. Now it looks as if at least one company is catching up with the Spectator. Chances seem good that all the Warner offices will be assembled here.

BIOGRAPHER OF VANDERBILT . . .

THE other evening I happened to pick up my autographed copy of Arthur D. Howden Smith's Commodore Vanderbilt, biography of the founder of one of the country's most famous fortunes, creator of the New York Central Railroad and the Nicaragua Transit, shortest and cheapest route for the gold rush pioneers. I have always found it fascinating reading, and a mine of material for a motion picture based on its picturesque subject and the development of transportation between the close of the Revolution and the panic days of the 1870's. I cordially recommend it to Cecil de Mille as a profitable substitute for my idea

of a Hudson's Bay Company picture, which he seems to have discarded.

Intelligence and the Box-Office . . .

DY AN odd coincidence Howden Smith walked in-**B** to my office the following afternoon. I had not seen him for years, but I found him as stimulating a conversationalist as ever, his brain teeming with ideas, most of which should be invaluable to any producer capable of appreciating a man whose novels and biographies constitute a permanent addition to American history, and whose theories of screen technique, independently formed, I consider strikingly original. I cannot understand why authors like Howden Smith have been ignored in Hollywood, unless it be through a mistaken conception that they are too highbrow for the average audience. When will the industry realize that fluid intelligence is not beyond the comprehension of people who patronize the box-office?

Galaxy of Plots . . .

NE feature of Smith's books which makes them good screen material is that they deal with American subjects. Take his Porto Bello Gold, the story of how the treasure happened to be buried on Treasure Island, which out-Stevensons Stevenson. there is his three-decked novel A Manifest Destiny, depicting the dramatic career of William Walker, the filibuster, who almost conquered Central America with a handful of American riflemen. And no major company should pass up Conqueror, a gorgeous joint biography of Cortez and Montezuma. It offers every opportunity for matchless screen effects. Old Fuss and Feathers, Smith's most recent book, is a biography of Winfield Scott, the victor of the Mexican War, the godfather of West Point and the instructor of Grant and Lee. It steams with energy and humor and presents zestfully an American character as individually attractive as Vanderbilt, with all the clash and panoply of three wars.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

 $\mathbf{0}^N$ A partly dismantled shack, an eyesore at the intersection of two of our placid country roads, is a sign: "Jim Wilson, councilman, refuses owner permission to remove this building." . . . For a getaway-from-it-all drive, take the road from the beach through Topanga Canyon: it winds through the mountains and brings you suddenly to a spot below which San Fernando Valley spreads out as a great mosaic of subdued colors, a superb scene framed in rolling hills against a background of distant mountains. . . I live where I want to live, do what I want to do, make my living at it; I can think of nothing else a man could want. . . . Except, perhaps, to have something done about Jim Wilson. . . . To demonstrate the cleverness of his dog, my host told me to drop a coin on the floor and watch the canine pick it up; she picked it up, swallowed it; neat trick. ... A pictorial memory: French peasant women doing family washing on the banks of the river which runs gently through Nice to the Mediterranean. . . .

Who is Jim Wilson, anyway? Never heard of him before. . . . Nippy mornings, these, in the Valley: this morning a film of ice on the water in the bird bath: poked it to see how thick it was; got the morning paper wet. . . . But the flowers go on, whatever the thermometer reading; stocks, snapdragons, marigolds, iris, narcissus, azalea all blooming energetically. . . . Too long between Jeanette MacDonald's pictures; my ears are itching to hear more of her singing. . . . I write my stuff in my own system of lazy-man's shorthand: "Pdr, dir and cmm did exl wk, stgs, cmps and phtg achg artistic results." Make it out? No? My secretary, poor girl, has to; this is the way she would bang it out on her typewriter: "Producer, director and cameraman did excellent work, settings, compositions and photography achieving artistic results." System saves physical wear and tear, and ink. . . . If I knew what council Jim Wilson is a member of, and which chair he sits in, I would put a burr on it. Who elected him to what, and why? I call upon Hugh Herbert, the mayor of our community, to help me blow up the shack and deposit the wreckage on Jim Wilson's front lawn, if he lives any place and has a lawn.

WE ARE TAKEN TO TASK

DEAR WELFORD:
That feeling is coming over me again. I can't help myself. Once more I am impelled to write to you—by something of yours in the current Spectator. I am convinced that you have not read either the play Of Mice and Men or the novel upon which the author based his own dramatization, otherwise you would not be guilty of such gross misstatements and such sweeping generalizations. You refer to "filthy dialogue and disagreeable theme." You refer to it as a "disgusting play". You state that it is a play "one of whose principal characters is a mouse which has been squeezed to death by a drooling half-wit." It is inconceivable to think that a literate man like yourself could make the criticism you have made after a reading of either the novel or the play. I assume that you have listened to some word-of-mouth comment or perhaps you have browsed through some reviews. In either case you ought to be ashamed of yourself. The theme of this play is in no sense of the word disgusting, filthy or offensive. On the contrary, it contains elements that are fine, noble and touching. It deals with the friendship which exists between two strange, unhappy men—one a kindly moron; the other a shrewd, hard-boiled, but at heart, sentimental illiterate. It deals with the not ignoble longings of these two dissimilar men to own a piece of soil upon which they can raise their crops and build their home. It is a grim play set against a sordid background, but it is written with pity, with understanding and with more than a touch of beauty. The mouse which you refer to as a principal character, is used briefly as a symbol of the kindly moron's brute strength. He likes to touch things that are soft and furry, and, while merely desiring to touch and fodle them, he kills unwittingly. If you will read the play for yourself I know that you will agree with me. It is deeply moving, and, if, as reported, James Cagney is going to do it for Warner Bros., it will, I feel sure, emerge on the screen as a fine, stirring record of a touching friendship between two men. If I am right in my assumption that your editorial was written before you read the play, then I think you owe your readers an apology for going off half-cocked, and, in any event, I think you owe an apology to John Steinbeck, the author, for disseminating such unjust and vicious misinformation.—F. Hugh Herbert.

Dear Hugh:

Many thanks for the book of the play which accompanied your letter. I will read it and cheerfully eat my words if I find I was unwise in taking the word of the Eastern commentator whom I always previously have found reliable.—W. B.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

SAM GOLDWYN'S BIG PARADE . . .

• GOLDWYN FOLLIES: Goldwyn - UA; producer. Samuel Goldwyn; associate producer. George Haight; director. George Marshall; story and screen play. Ben Hecht; additional sequences, Sam Perrin, Arthur Phillips; music. George Gershwin; lyrics, Ira Gershwin; ballet music. Vernon Duke; orchestration, Edward Powell; music direction. Alfred Newman; photography. Gregg Toland; color advisor, Ray Rennahan; art direction, Richard Day; costumes. Omar Kiam; ballet director, George Balanchine; film editor. Sherman Todd; assistant director, Eddie Bernoudy. Cast: Adolphe Menjou, Ritz Brothers, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Zorina, Kenny Baker, Andrea Leeds, Helen Jepson, Phil Baker. Ella Logan, Bobby Clark, Jerome Cowan, Nydia Westman, Charles Kullman, Frank Shields.

S A writer, I am a spendthrift; never store up A anything for a rainy day. During the past few months I have used all my superlatives in writing about pictures I have seen, and now along comes The Goldwyn Follies and I have not on hand one blessed superlative that will enable me to convey to you even a faint idea of the treat in store for you when you see it. If I had not overworked "magnificent", "superb", "gorgeous", I might use one of them now in the hope that its freshness might impress you; but all three of them have been applied to pictures which I now find, when I compare them with Sam's, are merely colossal. Perhaps, though, when we look back at Sam's record, and give him his just due, the highest praise we can bestow upon Follies is to say it is a Goldwyn picture, somewhat better than anything he has given us previously. As his poorest is better than the best of most of the other producers, this puts his best in a class all by itself and establishes a new mark for the entire film industry to shoot at.

Exceedingly Clever Production . . .

DOWNRIGHT cleverness in construction is the dominant feature of Follies. In my review last week of Happy Landing, Sonja Henie's latest, I complained of its length, said it gave us too much of everything, even Sonja's skating. The Goldwyn pic-

ture is half an hour longer than the Century production and does not give us enough of any one of its features. Happy Landing is in the same key throughout; Follies is beautifully balanced fare, a mixture of esthetic visual delights, grand opera, popular music, ballet dancing, hoofing, comedy, farce, romance, good acting-and Charlie McCarthy, the First Gentleman of Hollywood. With amazing cleverness the various features are woven into a story as part of its forward progress, thus keeping our interest alive. It is the only picture to develop so fully the possibilities of picture-making as a background. For all its comedy antics and interpolated acts, the story, in essence, is a serious one of a producer's ambition to make a good motion picture. Good taste is the dominant note of the production, good taste which is as much in evidence in boisterous comedy as it is in the exquisite ballet scenes. In no place in the picture is an effort made to stun us with the magnitude of a scene, admirable restraint being one of the elements of the prevailing good taste. In the ballet scenes there are only a score or so of dancers; in the grand opera sequence we see only one small, intimate scene, and but one small section of the audience. This grand opera excerpt, by the way, lends strength to the Spectator's contention that the screen can do more justice to grand opera than is possible in an opera house.

Boiling It All Down . . .

COME thousands of reviews have flowed out of my Ifountain pen, but I have to confess that this one has stumped me more than any other. Last night's feast was so sumptuous that this morning I have a rather bewildered impression of the whole thing. To give full credit to all who deserve it would fill a Spectator. The best I can do is to set down scattered impressions as they come to me now: George Marshall's direction really brilliant; the best he has done and no one could have done better. . . . Technicolor is beautiful enough perhaps even to justify the \$400,000 extra cost its use entailed. . . . Gregg Toland's photography superb. . . . The water ballet just about the most beautiful thing ever shown on the screen. ... When Andrea Leads walked up the stairs to fame in Stage Door, she walked into a career which will last; in a vastly different role in Follies she is sweet, appealing, intelligent, beautiful. . . . The veteran Adolphe Menjou never did better. . . . Zorina a splendid actress and sublime dancer; credit Sam Goldwyn with a rare discovery. . . . George Haight, associate producer, should be given a laurel wreath, or something. . . . I was getting tired of the Ritz Brothers, but they come back with a bang. . . . Kenny Baker and Andrea are the two new stars the picture makes; Kenny, admirably cast, sings and performs admirably. . . . Read the credits for all those who had a hand in providing the music, and applaud each one loudly. . . . Ditto the set designers. . . . Helen Jepson is beautiful, has a gorgeous voice, knows how to act. . . . Orchids for Omar Kiam, gowns; Julia Heron, set decorator. . . . Smooth, intelligent film editing by Sherman Todd. . . . Ella Logan and (Continued on page 10)

EXHIBITORS' MONTHLY BUYING GUIDE

★ The Spectator is gratified by the response of its exhibitor readers to the inclusion of this department. Buying pictures, however, is a serious business, and the Spectator reviewers do not set themselves up as authorities on the box-office values of the pictures they review. Each of the thumbnail reviews presented herewith is the expression of one

man's opinion, a man who has had no exhibitor experience. His opinion should be balanced with those expressed in other film papers. One thing Spectator exhibitor readers can depend upon is that its reviews are not influenced by anything except the convictions of the reviewers. We have no favorites among producer organizations, writers, directors or players.

(The figure after each title denotes date in January on which the review appeared in the Spectator)

COLUMBIA

★ HOUSE OF MYSTERY (8)—From the review: "Larry Darmour has turned out a nice little whodunit, as whodunits go. The story works logically and smoothly toward its climax, with some amusing by-play, an effective mood is established, and there is an engaging effortlessness in Lewis D. Collins' direction." Jack Holt is seen to better advantage than he has been for some time. Running time, 65 minutes.

LENFILM

★ PETER THE FIRST (8)—Definitely a class picture with appeal limited to the carriage trade. Preferable for a house showing foreign and art pictures. Will please all those who enjoy a picture that ranks with the finest the screen has to offer. If your patrons are looking for good acting, inspired direction, gigantic sets and a theme that is topical and big—then you can't miss. Peter the First has all the immensity of a Hollywood colossal, plus power and screen art.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

- ★ BAD MAN OF BRIMSTONE (8)—Of the Western variety; story is interesting, crammed with action, sudden death, pounding hooves, imposing scenery and plenty of people, but the whole thing is a terrific din from beginning to end, all the dialogue being shouted or screamed; if you have to show it, better hand your customers earmuffs as they go in; if you do not have to show it, don't. Running time, 82 minutes.
- ★ LOVE IS A HEADACHE (15)—This picture will cause adverse comment among those of your patrons who have come to expect much of Gladys George and Franchot Tone. An unbelievable story, uninspired direction and few production values will tend to make this a box-office headache. If you have Mickey Rooney followers this one should please them for this is definitely his picture. Your audiences will not like Gladys George in what amounts to an unsympathetic role because of the way it is written. Running time, 68 minutes.
- ★ PARADISE FOR THREE (22)—One of the gayest comedies we have had in a long time. Like all Metro offerings, it is presented handsomely and photographed beautifully. Direction is good except for loudness of some of the dialogue. Has a nice romance worked into the comedy which will keep your audience laughing continuously. Not one of Metro's biggest pictures, but one of its most entertaining. Running time, 75 minutes.
- ★ A YANK AT OXFORD (29)—A new Robert Taylor emerges in this first British-made film of MGM. There is greater genuineness, pliability and vigor in his work than ever before. He demonstrates his prowess at sprinting, boat racing, fisticuffs, and the athletic events are staged

with expert suspense. Very much an audience picture. Among the English players are some excellent actors, and equally effective are Lionel Barrymore and Maureen O'Sullivan. Running time, 100 minutes.

- ★ EVERYBODY SING (29)—Some hilariously funny production numbers stud this Metro musical, two of them contributed by the inimitable Fanny Brice, and there is some pleasant and punchy singing contributed by Allan Jones and Judy Garland. Certain shortcomings in story material and stretches of unimaginative direction, however, keep it from being a really outstanding musical. Still, everything considered, it is a good feature picture, and you need not be afraid of exploiting it. Running time, 80 minutes.
- **ARSENE LUPIN RETURNS (29)—An ordinary crook drama in essence, but taken out of the ordinary class by the fine production given it, by a strong cast and efficient direction; a detective-mystery thriller that will thrill and which maintains the mystery right up to its surprise ending. You safely may bill it as one of the best of its kind you have shown. Running time, 82 minutes.

PARAMOUNT

- ★ THE BUCCANEER (15)—Any C. B. de Mille picture is box-office. Critical people may complain that this story gets nowhere in particular, but the bulk of the thing will give your patrons an exceedingly good run for their money. In my review I characterized it as "big, boisterous, busy, beautiful," so much so that our attention is diverted from its weaknesses. Should do well for you if you do not have to mortgage your theatre to get it. Running time, 115 minutes.
- ★ THE RIVER (22)—This is the second documentary film to be produced by the United States Government, written and directed by Pare Lorentz. It is an impressive and informative film, a series of real-life shots which tell the story of the great Mississippi and of the South for the past hundred years. If your audiences are intelligent enough to be interested in social betterment at all, this short subject will please them mightily. It is understood that Paramount is planning to release the short to exhibitors either gratis or for a nominal sum.

R-K-O

- ★ SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (1)—Book it. The screen never before had anything like it; never again will have anything like it until Walt Disney makes another. Nothing else need be said. Running time, 80 minutes.
- ★ WISE GIRL (1)—Has a good deal of atmosphere of the Greenwich Village sort, some sentiment centering about two little girls, and much sock in the action; but the

film is sometimes more phoney than the Village is. Lack of taste in some scenes and an occasional descent into slap-stick mar it. Miriam Hopkins and Ray Milland are featured but neither do their best work. If your audiences are not too critical, however, they will be entertained. Running time, 70 minutes.

- ★ CRASHING HOLLYWOOD (1)—A satire on Hollywood, this piece has flavor and gets in a good many laughs at the expense of the film capital, although it is evident that no great care has been devoted to its production. There are abrupt changes in tone throughout it, and at the finish it goes melodramatic. Numerous scenes inside a studio may interest audiences. Will hold up as a B product. Running time, 61 minutes.
- ★ EVERYBODY'S DOING IT (8)—An amusing enough B picture, but one without too much logic behind it. If the Parent-Teacher's organization or other sociologyminded groups are active in your town, you had better go easy on exploitation, for there are several portions of the film which might not be conducive to making Junior an upright citizen. Drunkenness is held up as an amusing spectacle; there is much rough house; two ladies exchange black eyes. Running time, 66 minutes.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

- ★ CITY GIRL (1)—A B effort, this picture loses its opening punch by the inclusion of a crusading district attorney clean-up at the end. If your patrons appreciate a picture that does not pull its punches and that does not end in an ever-to-be-expected clinch fadeout they will go for this one. Exploitation from the Marked Woman angle should sell the picture. There are no names to help you. But the theme is pungent and is box-office. Running time, 63 minutes.
- ★ CHANGE OF HEART (15)—If your fans do not expect too much at the weak end of a double bill this one will make the grade. A minor B effort with no attempt made beside filling out the production schedule. Unfortunately a hackneyed theme and some spotty acting make this an indifferent picture. Will please the matinee trade. Running time, 65 minutes.
- ★ HAWAIIAN BUCKAROO (15)—If your kids go strong for cliff hangers and Westerns pass this one by. Too juvenile to attract adult attention, the picture lacks motion and excitement to keep the kids in their seats. Evalyn Knapp is lovely to look at, but Smith Ballew cannot act and is not given the opportunity to get into good fast action. Running time, 58 minutes.
- ★ LOVE ON A BUDGET (15)—Jones Family again. Though the story material is not quite as strong as it has been in some earlier films of the series, yet the family is as likable, as distinctly drawn and animated as ever. Their fans will not be disappointed. Running time, 60 minutes.
- ★ TARZAN'S REVENGE (22)—Glenn Morris the Eleanor Holm take up the Tarzan torch in this one. While it lacks much of the gloss and spectacularity of some earlier Tarzan films, it has novelty and a certain inspiration. If your main feature is strong, this one will prove satisfactory entertainment, but do not bank heavily on it. Children and uncritical adults will like it best, but discriminating patrons may not go for it at all. Running time, 68 minutes.

- ★ IN OLD CHICAGO (22)—Greatly over-exploited. Is an interesting picture, worth seeing, but perhaps not worth what you will have to pay for it. The boasted fire sequence is just a large number of buildings burning to the accompaniment of a terrific din which will leave your patrons more limp than pleased. Tyrone Power, a young player who no doubt is growing in favor with your people, sadly miscast here. Other performances all right; big production and much to recommend it if it had not been oversold before it was shown. Running time, 115 minutes.
- ★ HAPPY LANDING (29)—You know what Sonja Henie does to your box-office. Here is her finest picture; more action and story crammed into it than into either of her previous two; skating sequences of exquisite beauty. Sonja's performance as good as her skating; all the other performances outstanding. It will make good everything you say about it. Running time, 90 minutes.
- ★ INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT (29)—Not big, but good; an international drama, against a Shanghai background; full of suspense to hold the close attention of the audience; many dramatic scenes and thrills. You safely may put it down as the sort of picture your patrons will thank you for. Running time, 75 minutes.

UNIVERSAL

★ THE BLACK DOLL (22)—A nice little program picture that should do well anywhere. If they like mysteries, young love, or comedies, they'll go for this one which has all three ingredients. There is too much comedy for the amount of mystery, but Edgar Kennedy fans will love it. Exploit the mystery angle to the hilt, with heavy accent on the black doll possibilities. Running time, 60 minutes.

WARNER BROTHERS

- ★ HOLLYWOOD HOTEL (1)—One of the best musicals of the past year; its title exploited by radio each week and well known names in the cast. Good music, amusing comedy, elaborate sets photographed beautifully. If pictures of the sort have not worn out their welcome with your patrons, this one should bring them in. Running time, 104 minutes.
- ★ SWING YOUR LADY (15)—Decidedly worthwhile; amusing, full of action and offering a new locale, practically all its characters being hillbillies. Louise Fazenda, an old favorite, gives fine performance. Keep in mind the name of the director, Ray Enright, and look for his pictures; he can be counted upon for box-office product. Hillbilly Weaver Bank is a big feature of this one. Running time, 72 minutes.
- ★ PENROD AND HIS TWIN BROTHER (15)—Synthetically contrived story to get two Mauch Twins in where one should be; but an interesting story with story appeal to your young people and plenty of entertainment for the old ones. Scarcely strong enough to stand alone, but strong enough to carry a dual-bill mate which may be weak. Running time, 62 minutes.
- ★ GOLD IS WHERE YOU FIND IT (29)—One of the really fine pictures of the season, a beautiful technicolor job, of historical value, strongly dramatic and rich in human values, it will please all grades of audiences. A thrilling flood caused by the blowing-up of a dam, great expanses of California scenery, a sprinkling of comedy, and many excellent performances. One of those pictures you can exploit to the limit without danger of over-selling it. Running time, 90 minutes.

REVIEWS

(Continued from page 7)

Bobby Clark a great comedy team. . . . Nice performance by Jerome Cowan. . . Phil Baker's comedy fine, but I wish he had been allowed to play his concertina. . . . "Gorgeous Goldwyn Girls" are gorgeous girls, some golden. . . . Charlie McCarthy? Well, what is there to say except that Edgar Bergen is the cleverest entertainer now before the public? . . . And even if he had nothing else to his credit, The Goldwyn Follies entitles Sam Goldwyn to recognition as the World's Greatest Showman. . . I do not think even Jock Laurence, Sam's suave, resourceful and highly imaginative publicity purveyor, can claim much more than that.

MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXCEPTIONAL . . .

● RADIO CITY REVELS: RKO: producer. Edward Kaufman; director. Ben Stoloff; screen play. Matt Brooks, Eddie Davis, Anthony Veiller, Mortimer Offner; story, Matt Brooks; musical director. Victor Baravalle; lyrics, Herb Magidson; music, Allie Wrubel; vocal arrangements, Harry Simeone; musical production numbers directed by Joseph Santley; dances staged by Hermes Pan; photography, J. Roy Hunt, Jack MacKenzie; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase. Cast: Bob Burns, Jack Oakie, Kenny Baker, Ann Miller, Victor Moore, Helen Broderick, Milton Berle, Buster West, Jane Froman, Melissa Mason, Richard Lane, Marilyn Vernon, Hal Kemp and his orchestra.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

N EXCELLENT cast, lavish production numbers, A and some good situations in the story material should result in a musical film of exceptional calibre, but not always do. Radio City Revels is a case in point. The principal reason for the failure of this piece to result in a really bang-up show is that the ever present problem in the production of musicalsthe deft alliance of story and musical elements-is not well met. Production numbers are inserted into the action, rather than being allied with it, while the plot is allowed to peter out without a good climax and in an unconvincing way. Scarcely has the story gotten under way in its Manhattan locale than the scene shifts abruptly to Arkansas, where a lengthy musical number is staged, infectiously spontaneous in itself, but delaying the progress of the story and dissipating our interest in the action that already has taken place in New York. The abruptness with which we are jerked back to the initial action, incidently, could be alleviated by more careful editing. Similarly, the numbers at the close of the film have little direct relationship with the action. In musicals as well as straight films story values must be the primary consideration if a cohesive and consistently entertaining film is to result. Musical numbers must grow out of the action.

Kenny Baker Scores . . .

THOSE who can lose themselves in the pleasures of the moment, however, will find many moments affording pleasures to lose themselves in. There is the singing of Kenny Baker, than whom there is no better popular singer in pictures. When he warbles his

ditties the screen glows. Then there is Ann Miller, a class performer from the toes up, distinctive in her style of dancing, promising as an actress. In her final number she rises out of the floor, though having begun her tapping when hidden from sight—a striking effect. Bob Burns, Jack Oakie, Milton Berle are all in good form as funsters. Berle has modified his grimacing and gesturing and is more personable in this film than before. A little more modification and he will have adjusted himself to the requirements of the screen. Helen Broderick delivers her nifties with fitting emphasis, and Victor Moore is as capable as always, though his part in this picture is not large. Buster West, Jane Froman and others do effective work. Director Ben Stoloff, with an alert sense of comedy, has played up his comic situations for all they are worth, perhaps for a bit more than they are worth. Much of the humor hinges around the efforts of Oakie and Berle to get Bob Burns to sleep, the latter having the gift of composing and singing aloud songs in his sleep, a faculty unknown to himself, but one which has proven very profitable to the other gentlemen. I am inclined to think the scenes between the three of them were too prolonged, though the preview audience showed no diminution in its hilarity. Preview audiences, however, are prone to be deceptively generous.

Songs Sufficiently Tuneful . . .

ONSIDERABLE imagination has gone into the staging of the musical numbers, directed by Joseph Santley. The picture could have stood another number of the spectacularity and musical merit of the final one. The music and lyrics of Allie Wrubel and Herb Magidson were sufficiently tuneful, though nothing to scribble long missives to the home folks about. Speak Your Heart I thought the most pleasant. Van Nest Polglase and Al Herman have contributed suitably light-hearted and overwhelmingly spectacular settings, according to the scene, and first-rate photography has been done by J. Roy Hunt and Jack Mac-Kenzie. An interesting touch was the shifting of the camera up and down among the skyscrapers of Manhattan as they appear at night, this being done as a background for the long list of credits at the opening of the picture. The jewel-like windows of the buildings passing before the audience gave movement and



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color to what might have been a static opening, and helped to set the mood of the film as well.

CHEERING—BUT NOT FOR LONG . . .

● START CHEERING: Columia: associate producer. Nat Perrin; director. Albert S. Rogell; story. Corey Ford; screen play, Eugene Solow, Richard E. Wormser, Phillip Rapp: photographer, Joseph Walker; special effects, Ganahl Carson; music director. Ben Stoloff; dance numbers. Danny Dare; film editor. Gene Havlick: assistant director. Arthur Black. Cast: Jimmy Durante, Walter Connolly, Joan Perry. Charles Starrett, Gertrude Niesen, Raymond Walburn, Broderick Crawford, Three Stooges, Dr. Craig E. Earle, Hal LeRoy, Ernest Truex. Virginia Dale, Chaz Chase, Jimmy Wallington, Romo Vincent, Gene Morgan, Louise Stanley, Arthur Hoyt. Howard Hickman, Minerva Urecal, Arthur Loft, Nick Lukats, Louis Prima and his band, Johnny Green and his orchestra.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

COLUMBIA'S gift to the undergraduate world and college lover, Start Cheering, started off like a house on fire. Believe it or not, I applauded various sequences. And critic applause is not de rigeur. As a matter of fact, critics are supposed to sit on their hands and look very, very sullen and pass on witty cracks to those seated nearby. Yes, sir, I really clapped them mitts for sheer delight. But then, when the picture started getting sour because of age-formula, I took on the correct appearance of a film reviewer. Start Cheering opened with a terrific bang and looked like a swell satire. Everything was there for a good rib dig at all things academically proper. And the picture might have emerged as a swell comedy if it had not started to take itself seriously. The plot is not important. The situation is briefly this: a Hollywood star, idol of millions as a screen football hero, matriculates at a small college which uses his name to fill its athletic stadium. Enter the girl. Enter a chase. Enter formula number sixty-eight.

Schnozzola Wins By a Nose . . .

BY ALL odds this is Jimmy Durante's picture. Where has that man been? He was a howl and even the most calloused critics cannot ignore the gales of laughter that smothered lines coming from the screen. Heard tell he was washed up cinematically. Heard tell that rumor is spurious, because if he can deliver as he does in Start Cheering, none need worry about his box-office draw. Give him the vehicle and he will produce. He played the dim-wit assistant to Walter Connolly to perfection. Walter himself seemed miscat. He did his part well enough, but I have seen him in more subtle roles than his present assignment. Charles Starrett is an engaging young man who has been relegated to Westerns. I think he has something, and given the proper roles can show his ability. Raymond Walburn enacted the role of college dean splendidly, got the most out of his portrayal. Ernest Truex seemed smothered under by a part which did not permit much latitude. He is one of the screen's finest comedians and deserves more of a camera break than the current effort allows him. Hal Leroy can dance like a million, another lad who has been denied by pictures.

Production Splendid Throughout . . .

DRODUCER Nat Perrin has given Start Cheering good production values. The picture looks more expensive than it probably was, which seems to indicate a judicious and wise expenditure of money. The sets by Stephen Goosson and Lionel Banks look more authentically college than I have ordinarily seen. Midland really looked like a university; not Billy Rose's concept of what it should be. The music is excellent and the Big Apple sequence the best of the current crop. Full credit to Danny Dare who staged it and Ganahl Carson who executed it. I fell for that 'Strut Away'' dance by Jimmy Durante like a ton of bricks. His takeoff on the present craze for Suzie Q and Shag and the rest is a treasure. No indication whose inspiration that number is, but to the uncredited a laurel. I honestly felt that Gertrude Niesen's singing was entirely out of place. First, the songs themselves were definitely not of undergraduate tenor. Collegians like their music either smooth or swingy; not hot and sticky. Added to this is the fact that her solos slowed down the tempo of the story that demanded quick and breezy acting. I have the same feeling about the Three Stooges who I felt were out of place in the story. Like the Ritz Brothers, their routine varies little from picture to picture. The spectator shoves across the ticket counter for something new. Chaz Chase, on the other hand, was amusing. His antics and cellulose-eating proclivities are new and therefore interesting. Mention, too, of Eugene Solow, Richard E. Wormser and Philip Rapp, who have given an overworked theme a novel twist. Director Albert S. Rogell has given the picture imaginative direction and, except for the ending, stayed away from cliches. I wanted to enjoy Start Cheering more than I did.

IS LIFE LIKE THAT? . . .

● WALKING DOWN BROADWAY; 20th Century-Fox; executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; director, Norman Foster; screen play, Robert Chapin, Karen De Wolf; photographer, Virgil Miller; music direction, Samuel Kaylin; film editor, Norman Colbert. Cast: Claire Trevor, Phyllis Brooks, Leah Ray, Dixie Dunbar, Lynn Bari, Jayne Regan, Michael Whalen, Thomas Beck, Douglas Fowley, Walter Woolf King, Jed Prouty, Robert Kellard, Joan Carol, Leon Ames, William Benedict, Maurice Cass.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

WALKING DOWN BROADWAY is one of those slice-of-life stories about six little chorus girls who promise on one New Year's Eve to meet and celebrate the next. What happens to them in the interim is the basis of the current story. Unfortunately, I do not agree with Screen Writers Karen de Wolf and Robert Chapin. For by year's end two of the girls have died, both by violence, one is imprisoned for killing a man in self defense. One is running away with her emblezzling fiancee. The fifth is married to a doddering old buffer. And the last tries to escape life in general only to have her love catch up with her. Now that's a pretty sorry interpretation of life in general. I do not go for sugar and spice. But I also ask for realism. I think Walking Down Broad-

way misses fire because it relies too much on tragedy and mishap to work out the plot. I enjoyed the picture, nevertheless, and it is a good film. Director Norman Foster has given his direction originality and the current effort emerges as a fast moving and smoothly paced drama. This story moves along with proper zip, never lags and drives home to its inexorable climax. Under less capable hands the story might have strayed. I think Norman Colbert, film editor, has done a fine job of editing. The problem of giving each of six girls enough footage so that they would be properly identified in the spectator's mind was a difficult one. Except for one or two opening shots the picture flowed smoothly.

Studded with Good Performances . . .

WALKING DOWN BROADWAY is replete with performances of outstanding calibre. Claire Trevor does a fine job as the mother of the chorus brood. The most level-headed of the six girls, she gives a finely shaded performance and makes her role real and vital. Dixie Dunbar garnered most of the film's laughs with her portrayal of a dumb chorus dame. Her pertness and cuteness got audience applause. Phyllis Brooks scored again as the gold digger of the group, and Jayne Regan as the romantic ingenue. Lynn Bari, as a Hollywood-bound youngster, killed immediately after the New Year's pledge of reunion, was ingratiating, and Leah Ray gave a mature performance as the girl who wanted excitement. Thomas Beck did a good job as the other part of Jayne Regan's heart interest. Walter Woolf King was good as the unsuccessful suitor for Claire's hand. I felt he should have won over Michael Whalen. But then that is a personal opinion. Leon Ames was convincingly menacing as a gun-toting gangster. The more I consider the size of the cast and the necessity for making each girl stand out so as to be remembered, the more I doff my cap to Director Norman Foster. His problem was not only difficult; it was Gargantuan. Returning to the screen writers, a laurel for their clear, crisp dialogue. Sol Wurtzel shows himself the King of Hollywood B's by giving a lavish production without resorting to the attend-

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ant cast. Walking Down Broadway, according to its reported shooting schedule, took less than four weeks. Under less stringent supervision such a picture, with its many-take necessity, might have wandered from the low budget fold.

CINEMATIC SOLILOOUY

Induced by RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD of MABEL KEEFER

WHENEVER I hear someone say, "I am growing tired of screen musical comedies," I take to brooding over the shortsightedness of the film industry in regard to musical shorts. It seems to me if we had our screen musicals given to us in smaller doses they would go over better, and then, an occasional feature musical would be a novelty. The right type of musical short could do much to lift a program, and might easily counteract disappointment in the feature picture. But the shorts must be good! The horrors that are so often inflicted on us-saccharine or maudlin sentimentality; stiff, stilted acting, and either mediocre music or raucous noise masquerading as music-will not do. There is so much good music waiting to be used—not, necessarily, what is termed "high-brow", but music that arouses wholesome emotions-and combined with real romance, beauty of background and clever comedy, the psychological effect is sure to be good box-office. Most of the music used for the Disney cartoons has an infectious lilt to it that gets under one's skin and gives him a feeling of good will toward all men, and particularly toward the motion picture business. There are two kinds of musical shorts I should like to see produced: The kind that would need the best artists in the country, and would really be artistic gems (in spite of a comparatively low cost of production), and a less pretentious type that would give young, unknown singers a chance to prove whether they have got what it takes. Both types should be made with meticulous directing—the last as well as the first—and both should have music that is gay, lilting; deep with feeling; infectious, even comic; plaintive, poignant; but always music that makes us feel that, after all, life is pretty much worth while.

10. HENRY said: "Life is made up of sobs, sniffles and smiles with sniffles predominating." Which is why I think smiles should predominate on the screen. . . . And that recalls something I meant to take up with Editor Beaton long before this. . . . Many moons ago in the course of a picture review he complained about a part that should have made a strong appeal to the emotions, but which, because of some flaw in the directing, left him cold, and there-fore he was "cheated out of a damned good cry." What I meant to tell him was that some of us have so d- that is, such a deuce of a lot to cry about in

real life, we want only a small helping in the theatre... But he wouldn't know about that, what with Mrs. Spectator leaving midnight lunches in the refrigerator for him and luscious cakes in boxes on top and all kinds of things like that happening to him.

DOUBLE feature bills—I dislike them! Quite definitely, I dislike them! And so do a lot of other people in this town. Fortunately we do not have many. I wonder if they are popular generally, particularly in the smaller towns? There is a psychological aspect to the double feature question. Last night I had to sit through some tiresome picture—I have forgotten its foolish name—in order to see Victoria the Great, and it speaks well for the Britishmade picture that I enjoyed it so much after being bored by the other picture. It would seem that producers run the risk of having their best pictures spoiled by double feature bills.

WIDESPREAD interest in the proposed Sir William Johnson bicentennial celebration, which will be held here in our Mohawk Valley during the coming summer, strengthens my belief that people in general welcome changes in scenic backgrounds on the screen. The interest in the celebration is evident not only in this country, but also in Canada, and it is only natural to assume that the beauty of the Mohawk Valley has something to do with it, as well as the historical significance of the proposed pageantry. With such wealth of beautiful scenery all over the country, it seems to me that new locales for original story backgrounds would bring a welcome freshness to the screen.

SOMETHING I should like to see on the screen: Two armed forces are ready to do battle from trenches on either side of some "no man's land." The strains of "The Whistler and His Dog" are heard, and down the middle of "no man's land" comes a line of men, whistling the tune and marching along with empty hands. Heads appear over the tops of the trenches on either side, and one by one, guns are dropped and men run out and join the marchers, whistling as they tramp along. . . . Crazy idea, is it not? But try it! Whistle the tune—"The Whistler and His Dog"—to yourself; imagine the line of men passing in front of you, and see if something inside of you doesn't jump out and go along with them.

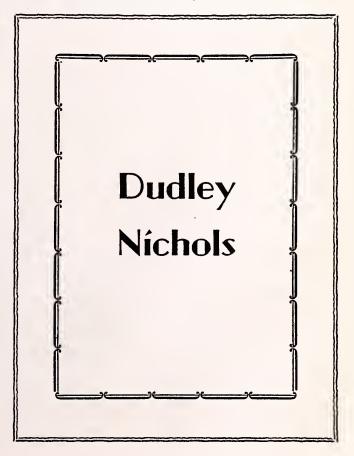
RACHMANINOFF'S Prelude in G Minor seems to me to tell the story of one who determinedly starts out to accomplish some certain thing. He goes doggedly on for a time, with occasional resolute spurts, then moves more slowly, plaintively, even poignantly—wondering what it is all about. Finally, off he goes again, more determined than ever to reach his objective. Suppose one were to write a screen story around this theme! The Prelude would say to the hero what I have just written, and at

crucial moments in his life—but why give away a good story to the film industry?

SORRY I did not see You're Only Young Once. My curiosity being aroused by so many people telling me that it was genuinely pleasing, I looked up Mr. Harlen's review in the Spectator. From that, and from the things I have been told about the picture, I assume that the cost of production would not be high, comparatively speaking. Yet people wear pleased expressions when they talk about it, and the word most often used in describing it is "genuine".

SOMEONE has said: "The less people speak of their greatness, the more we think of it." I submit that idea to producers and exhibitors for consideration in regard to motion picture advertising. Why not try omitting all ballyhoo, and instead use quiet, restrained statements of what they consider the good points of the picture they are presenting. I doubt if many people pay attention to the blustering, bellowing type of advertising any more. It has become such an old story they just do not bother to read it.

READING those reverberant statements of Robert Joseph, under the caption, "Ringing Challenge to Congress..." (Spectator of January 15, 1938) I became so enthused I found myself muttering, "Hear! Hear!" He rang the bell every time.



MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

HAPPY LANDING is the word for it! Or Darryl Zanuck has done it again with Happy Landing, latest starring film for Sonja Henie, Don Ameche and Ethel Merman. If Twentieth Century-Fox could turn out a screen music drama in which action, dialogue, musical numbers and music background were fused so well as in this production, the problem of film opera would be brought nearer solution. For one thing is certain, screen music drama need neither be purple romance nor grey psychology cold as dawn "the morning after." In short, this Roy Del Ruth directed production is by far the best musical in many a moon. One would infer that musical story possibilities must stimulate the music maker. A screen play, to bring out their best, must interest the composer and lyricist, no matter how prolific they may be. As I have stated in this column before, a music department can never make a bad picture into a good one, but a good one can be raised to the level of excellency by means of music. This is what happened in Happy Landing, thanks to Composer Sam Prokrass, Versifier Jack Yellen and the helpful general music supervision of Louis Silvers. I have come to question myself in certain instances how much one or the other general music director at this or that studio really contributed to one or the other score. In any case, I have yet to see a dead rabbit come out of Mr. Silvers' pseudo-magical hat.

Pertinent Question . . .

SONG-MAKERS Prokrass and Yellen have done sweet and smart work, or to quote a phrase, they have written hot and happy tunes. Some of them should rank among the best songs in every sense of the word. For all I know, the songs, that is to say, their full harmonic arrangements plus orchestrations, may be the work of Prokrass as well as his fetching melodies. Quite often this is not the case in Hollywood. A man may write a song melody with a piano accompaniment which, when printed, may pile up editions totalling more than a million copies. Not seldom, however, is it an arranger and orchestrator who assures him of that greater success which comes with novel and appealing settings and orchestrations. I believe the day will come when arrangers and orchestrators will form some kind of a guild and demand proper recognition by way of screen credits and other acknowledgments. Some are well paid, but . . . I am getting away from my subject. The fact is that harmonizations, rhythmic ingenuity, especially by way of juxta-position (rhythmic counterpoint to the technical), and orchestrations in Happy Landing are of uniformly high calibre and fascinatingly ingenious. They display a truly remarkable skill because superimposed rhythms and variety of colors, no matter how fast the tempo, always sound clear. There is sense of exhilaration and gusto in this score which is so appealing that, for the first time in half a year at least. I felt a desire of hearing the music again, meaning, of course, the entire production.

Counting the Hits . . .

CEVERAL musical teams are listed on the credit I sheet besides Sam Prokrass and Jack Yellen. Of the four Prokrass-Yellen numbers I would choose A Gypsy Told Me So and Hot and Happy, one for romance, the other for what the name implies. Walter Bullock and Harold Spina may take repeated bows for You Appeal to Me. Best among single numbers, however, is the War Dance of the Wooden Indians, by Raymond Scott. From a tune definitely expressive of the title, the piece gradually turns into a musically loose-minded tap dance. This results in veritable jugglery of diverse, rapidly shifting rhythms. It is a well-ordered riot of rhythms, a truly unusual bit of spell-binding, produced by a superbly swinging orchestra. There are also two capital dancers combining machine-like certainty and endurance with free rhythm cadences of improvisation. The band and the Raymond Scott Quintet are highlighted in various novel and smart ways. A clever trick was to neon-light the outlines of the band instruments, while at other times close-ups of hot, happy and exceptionally skilful jazz players proved entertaining and decidedly interesting.

When In Norway . . .

OF THE four ice ballet scenes the first one seemed to me less well synchronized than the others. I presume the fact that the ice carnival takes place in Norway is the reason for choosing music from Rimsky-Korsakoff's opera Snegoroutchka. Why not use Norwegian music, either by Grieg, or tradition? Even such bright Swedish folk songs such as Peterson-Berger strung together for a Nordic travelogue, shown the other day at the International Grand Theatre, might have been more suitable than the hopping accents of the Russian composer whose melodic contours frequently did not fit smoothly the gliding legato of the skaters. This, however, is one of the few disturbing shortcomings of the production. Timing and phrasing during the later skating sequences are excellent, whether in the case of Sonja Henie's solo skating, or during whole cavalcades of sure and graceful skaters. The ridiculous Umba-Umba song of the Svenska band leader during one of the rink episodes and the umba-efforts of the Rubanoff of the Bass Tuba will be treasured in my most private memory chest. Music is such a serious business, that I thoroughly welcome the genuinely comic musician, such as this bass-tuba comedian, as well as the actual tuba player who will never be known, because he probably functioned in the wings. I enjoyed Ethel Merman's jazz singing, and Don Ameche revealed smooth and warmly expressive tone. And often, while following the emphatic inflection

given to the dialogue by Sonja Henie, it seemed to me, time and again, as if I were hearing anew the speaking voice of my unforgettable friend, Mme. Ernestine Schumann-Heink.

What a College . . .

MOT always is it possible for the film music re-N viewer to refrain from peeping across the fence, so to speak, and contemplating the contents of the scenario hothouses where the different species of Hollywood flora are cultivated. It is not his business, of course, but occasionally the music reviewer (again metaphorically speaking), suffers an attack of dramatic hay fever. And sneeze he must, although not in the disgusting unrestraint which on certain screen occasions is considered funny by those responsible. Film music cannot be judged as the medium it is without taking into account the film. It does not exist for itself, although it may have intrinsic quality as music per se. I have no idea how Start Cheering has impressed my fellow reviewers. I think it is too unimportant in every respect to waste time and valuable magazine space on, except that its demerits will cheerily be offered the cheer-needy public. Some people take to drink when they are sad, others go to movie houses. Hence every picture really is important; hence it is a pity, to my mind, that the story of this Columbia-produced college comedy is so poor, too poor to stimulate music makers to provide more than average music. Gertrude Niessen sings two torchy songs. Her's is a good bright voice, one of the naturally more appealing voices I have heard from singing thespians.

Do They Know? . . .

CTATISTICS are good for propaganda purposes, but quite often they can be interpreted in more than one way. An exhibitor will vote from a different viewpoint from the fan, and the fan differs from the professional reviewer and he again from the producer. Box-office returns yield certain irrefutable figures, but a picture may have been billed disadvan-tageously, nationally or locally. The public, I am certain, is not so unmindful of musical values that advertising in its various forms should make so little mention of the musical assets of a production. Often the publicity department does not know or is not informed sufficiently regarding certain addition to or occurrences in their music department-additions and occurrences which might make the important columns of music pages in important dailies and weeklies. One of the principal Hollywood studios recently added a composer to its staff, one who in his day took prize after prize in European competitions. He is a musical world figure, but to the studio staff he is just a skilful, quietly spoken man who does not lift a finger to advertise himself. In another spot on studio-row there is employed one of those musical gentlemen who lead a dual life. They have success on Broadway, but also in Carnegie Hall. He is copy, whether in a gay or in a contemplative mood. In a third, likewise leading studio, Francia White is the singing stand-in for an actress who does only the lip movements. Does it do any good to try to make a public believe for a while that it is the actress who does the singing? The public is growing tone-wiser than some studio executives. The star in question is a good actress. It is not to be expected that she be also a good singer. Who can be all things to all people all the time?

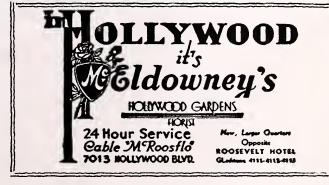
Speaking of Votes . . .

CERTAIN publication prints different tables purporting to show the biggest money-maker, biggest popularity of stars. Among the alleged twelve best money-makers, the picture with the best score takes fifth place. This is Lost Horizon, the music by Dimitri Tiomkin. A fine score by Max Steiner went with A Star Is Born, which picture ranked number one. Second place was taken by Waikiki Wedding which contains some definitely appealing tunes, some very good orchestration and the advantage of Bing Crosby's singing one or two fine tunes. There occurred quite outstanding choral sequences in Double or Nothing with Crosby at his vocal best. But that picture did not make the financial grade, according to this table of moneyearners. And it is interesting to note that Good Earth, with a helter-skelter score, came twelfth at the bottom of the list, although people were agog about the picture. But I found another table of comparisons which deserve some thought. Who are the twelve film stars, most popular on the air, according to this magazine poll? Jack Benny first. He does not count vocally. Bing Crosby rates second. He has a lovely voice. Jeanette MacDonald came third. I am inclined to class her as the best singing actress who has not come to the screen from the opera. Deanna Durbin took fifth place and Lily Pons sat back on number nine. The last three air favorites among film stars do not sing-thanks be to God, who gave them sufficient brains to refrain from yodling.

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Twelfth Year

Los Angeles, California—February 12, 1938

Vol. 12-No. 34

Production Reform Needed

Present Jumbled Method of Making Pictures

Must Give Way to Unit System to

Permit Functioning of Real

Picture Brains

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If We're Going to Have Nothing But All-Talkies
We Should Let John Brahm Direct the Lot of Them

—See Review of "Penitentiary." Page Six.

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.. REVIEWS ...

OF HUMAN HEARTS ★ PENITENTIARY
A SLIGHT CASE OF MURDER ★ CASSIDY OF BAR 20

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



GETTING AFTER AGENCY RACKET . . .

THE action of Joseph M. Schenck, president of I Twentieth Century-Fox, in barring the Myron Selznick agency from the company's lot, perhaps is the first step in line with the Spectator's recommendation in its last issue that something must be done to eliminate racketeering from the agency business. In its issue of December 19, 1936, the Spectator related in detail how Myron Selznick personally held up production on a Warner Brothers set until the studio tore up an existing contract with Errol Fynn-a contract with which Flynn had been content-and gave him a new one calling for a much larger salary. The only other way out for the studio would have been to scrap all the film which had been exposed and start the picture again with another leading man. It was aware it was being held up shamelessly, but it had to yield to avoid the enormous loss it would have suffered if it had refused to meet Selznick's demands. I do not know what incident has led to Selznick's banishment from the Century lot, but I do know that to protect itself against budget disruption caused by uncertainty as to salary demands made unexpectedly by agents who have no regard for the terms of existing contracts, every producing organization should ponder the advisability of following the Schenck lead in an effort to make the talent market in general more stable. As long as the executives pay themselves the outrageously high salaries they are drawing, actors, writers and directors are entitled to all they can get, but the getting should be effected by more legitimate methods than those employed by Selznick to get more for Flynn. No one element of the industry's personnel can stand aloof from the others. The welfare of all of them depends upon the welfare of the industry as a whole. The entire business is conducted as a grand racket with small regard for the interests of the stockholders in the various companies, but the racketeers at least should play fair with one another.

DARK WATERS AHEAD . . .

THE foundation of picture production policy soon will be unable to bear the weight of the constantly increasing expense which it is being called upon to carry. Studio heads already are getting the scent of a collapse of some sort. The necessity for a change

in policy constantly is becomining more apparent. The only financial troubles the industry can experience are due to the failure of pictures to bring in enough money to take care of operating expenses. A business which gets its revenue in cash each day, should have no financial troubles if the cost of manufacture is kept within the possible earning power of the product. Picture expenses have grown beyond all reason, a condition for which producers are solely responsible and which can be remedied only by a revolution in the production system. There is no lack of picture brains in Hollywood. The studios are full of skilled people who could make better pictures than are being made, but between them and their opportunity to do so, stands a group of production executives who nullify their efforts, enormously salaried executives who know nothing about screen writing or directing but who dictate to both writers and directors.

Not One-Man Jobs . . .

MONG so many production executives, of course, Athere are some competent ones, but the efforts of most of them are weakened by the conditions under which they work. The chief difficulty is their inability to obtain direct contact with the individual whose decision is final. In several studios the top production executives are trying to hold down jobs which should be divided into pieces and shared with a dozen lieutenants. Hal Wallis at Warners, Darryl Zanuck at Century, try to make thirty or forty pictures each year. No man on earth can administer competently a job of that sort. By virtue, however, of the high admission prices the theatres of the country charge, both these companies earned big profits last year. That would appear to justify the production policy. But each of the studios during the year turned out pictures which lost money, others which brought in little above their production costs. If the studios' production policies had made it possibleas they very easily could—to turn out nothing but highly successful pictures, to what heights then would the yearly profits have risen?

Bad Pictures, Bad Business . . .

THE disquieting aspect of the profit situation is that the last quarter of last year showed a sharp drop in receipts without any compensating drop in expenses. The depression of the early thirties was

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No Cuto

well under way before the film industry felt its effect. With the return of a measure of prosperity, film audiences assembled in sufficient numbers to make the film industry prosperous again, but the Roosevelt-manufactured general business recession was almost beaten to the wire by the recession in film theatre box-office receipts, and, as I pointed out in a previous Spectator, it was felt in those sections of the country which were not affected by the general business decline. Producers can argue as they will, pass the buck in any direction they choose, but the fact remains that the picture business is getting bad solely because they are turning out bad pictures. There is no excuse for a picture which flops. There is no excuse for a fourfigured weekly salaried man turning out anything except a picture which makes money. There is no excuse for a production policy which makes it impossible for picture brains to function.

Unit Production Must Come . . .

UNIT production is the way out for the film industry. It is the only rational method of making pictures. Any object of art should be the expression of one mind. Ninety per cent of the pictures Hollywood makes are the jumbled expression of a multitude of minds which reason purely objectively. A writer and a director agree a certain sequence is essential to the picture they are preparing; the associate producer is not sure of it; all three wait perhaps a month to get five minutes of the harrassed time of the studio production head; in the five minutes he makes a decision which would take five hours of careful consideration to arrive at wisely. The writer and director see the sequence in its relation to all the other elements of the story; the production head sees it as an isolated fragment, remembers that about the time of the Johnstown flood the same bit of business was in a picture which flopped, orders its elimination, turns distractedly to something else. There are writers in Hollywood who can write perfect scripts; there are directors who can direct them perfectly; there are producers who can produce them economically. By the general adoption of the unit system, groups of the three would be drawn together after weeding out and reshuffling, until each worked congenially and gave expression to a united mind. Decisions would be made only by people qualified to make them.

Production Head Necessary . . .

A STUDIO organized on a same have a supreme production head whose mission that the season's output would it would be to see that the season's output would consist of a proper mixture of comedies, dramas, musicals; who would settle which of two competing producers would get this or that star; who at all times would be available for conferences and who never would be disturbed by a multitude of details. The head of one unit might be a writer; of another, a director; of a third, a producer. No unit would make more than two A pictures in one year. Living salaries should be paid them, their main compensation being a percentage of the profits of their pictures. Obviously the producer of the highly successful picture should receive more for his work than the producer of a less successful picture should receive for his. The inauguration of such a policy would be followed by a great weeding-out of the incompetents whose names now clutter studio payrolls, and place the making of pictures in the hands of those who know how they should be made. I think it is safe to venture the opinion that the cost of producing the whole season's pictures would be reduced almost by half.

LeBaron Has Right Idea . . .

FOR one thing, a man whose income depends upon the success of pictures he makes himself, is going to see to it that no money is wasted on his productions. He is going to devote his attention solely to his own job and is not going to follow the present Hollywood practice of each producer trying-just for the fun of the thing and because, in any event, it is the stockholders' money—to spend more on a production than any of the other fellows ever spent. In short, the unit producer will produce sensibly, which in itself will be an astounding revolution in production methods. Here and there we find the unit production policy already in effect. William LeBaron, Paramount production head, is a believer in it. Frank Lloyd, Wesley Ruggles, C. B. de Mille, Ernst Lubitsch, Fritz Lang and William Wellman have their individual units. All that Bill LeBaron has to do with them is to see that all of them do not make the same kind of pictures at the same time, that they do not run wild on budgets and that each gets his fair share of the services of contract stars and supporting players under contract to the studio. The system has not had time yet to express itself fully in terms of earnings, as it is just getting under way, but there can be no doubt of its success.

Gives Andy Stone a Chance . . .

BILL LeBARON is not confining the embrace of the unit plan to veteran directors alone. There is a young fellow on the lot making a picture virtually on his own. The credits carry his name as producer, writer, director. He is Andrew L. Stone, a young man with a picture mind which Bill is affording an opportunity to function. For ten years I have had my eye on Andy. That long ago he brought me a script to read and criticize. Last week he reminded me of it and told me he had incorporated some of my suggestions in the story, and it is the story he then was shooting. For a decade he kept it, not offering it for sale, determined some day to direct it himself. He wrote and directed one other picture, The Girl Said No, for Grand National; Bill LeBaron saw it-and now young Stone is on his own at Paramount. There are other Andy Stones in Hollywood—quite a lot of them, ready to turn out quite a lot of boxoffice pictures. The trouble is the lack of enough Bill LeBarons.

CHARTING RUDY'S FUTURE . . .

WHEN and if Rudy Vallee ever gets tired of music, he should turn his attention he should turn his attention to public life. Last week I heard him make an extemporaneous speech at a press function on a Warner Brothers stage. It flowed out of him without effort, sentences well rounded, their meaning clear, his English perfect—a plausible, entertaining exposition of his subject. Most of our public men show such little regard for the niceties of the English language and the rules of grammar governing its use, that listening to a speech like Rudy made comes under the heading of pleasant experiences.

AFTER READING THE PLAY . . .

BASING the assertion on the comments of an Eastern critic's review of Of Mice and Men, I wrote in the Spectator of January 29, that the New York play, for which Hollywood producers were bidding against one another to secure it as story material for screen presentation, had "filthy dialogue and a disagreeable theme," and I ventured the opinion that it was not suitable for screen adaptation. In the last Spectator, my good friend, F. Hugh Herbert, took issue with me. He sent me a copy of the play and assured me that if I would read it, I would find that "The theme of this play is in no sense of the word disgusting, filthy or offensive; on the contrary, it contains elements that are fine, noble and touching. I read the play and admit now that if I had read it before commenting on it, I would not have written of it as I did. I would have been more vehement in my denunciation. As a psychological study it has some appeal, but as screen material it is impossible. Two characters, George and Lennie, are of equal importance, the story being one of the friendship existing between the two. To give you an impression of George, I will quote one of his comparatively in-offensive speeches: "You know, Lennie, I'm scared I'm gonna tangle with that bastard myself. I hate his guts! Jesus Christ, come on! There won't be a damn thing left to eat." A mild speech, this, when compared with scores of others in the play. Lennie's mentality is somewhat below that of a half-wit; he kills progressively a mouse, a puppy, a woman. In the final scene George kills Lennie. The woman, the only one in the play, is a slut who in each of her scenes makes indecent overtures to some man in her husband's employ, a negro being the last to receive her attention.

Lacks Elements of Popularity . . .

AT THIS writing, the papers report that Metro and Warners are trying to outbid each other in an effort to secure this literary prize. It is a strong play—strong like a skunk, and what is left after it is deodorized would make the most unpleasant picture ever shown on the screen, one lacking in all the elements of popular entertainment. True, the two leading parts present opportunities for powerful characterizations, but they would get their strength solely from their repulsive drawing, and the closer the screen adaptation adhered to the original, the more disgusting it would be. And it is only with a feeling of disgust that one can contemplate the actions of film producers in endeavoring to secure it, disgust

which is heightened when one thinks of the thousands of pleasant and respectable themes the writers of Hollywood can put into screen plays.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS...

TABLE-FOR-TWO, set for dinner in front of the wood fire last night; between us a bowl of the wallflowers which are blooming along the eastern side of the house; modest little flowers of dull gold, their perfume also suggesting modesty, their presence suggesting more courage than that of the more robust flowers which do not bloom in winter. . . . Even if Sophie, one of our ducks, seems to enjoy it. I feel it is unsportsmanlike of Freddie, the spaniel, to drag her around the grounds by the neck. . . . I gather from the papers that it is all right for Japan to do what she pleases to United States citizens or property as long as she apologizes afterwards. . . . Every day I eat two baked apples but do not know who the doctor is that the second one keeps away. . . . Beautiful drives at this season of the year are those through the orange growing districts; ranks of trees in green uniforms with gold buttons. . . . An unforgettable cinematic moment: George E. Stone, as a little old man, pensive, still, standing alone at the top of a short flight of steps in Cimarron: looking down on a fashionable gathering, in his eyes memories of hardships of the pioneering days; part of a great performance which since has got him only ratty minor parts in gangster pictures. . . . The snow can stay on the mountain tops and I will stay in the valleys; I can get all I want of it by looking at it from a vast distance. . . . But I used to be a wiz at bob-sleigh riding. . . . On a rainy morning it takes Russell, our milkman, an hour longer than on dry mornings to cover his route. . . . If winter rains depress you, come out to the Valley and see us semifarmers smile when it pours; it is not only rain which falls; it is life for the soil, fertility for fields, color and perfume for flowers, raindrops which tickle the toes of growing things and make them push their way into the sun whose warmth fashions them into things of beauty to make life more worth living. . . . Ultimately I find things out; for ten years I have been filling my lighters by shaking drops of fluid out of the cans; this morning discovered I could get a steady stream by squeezing the can.

APPROVES OUR EDITORIAL POLICY

DEAR Mr. Beaton:

I was greatly interested by the plainspoken letter from a motion picture writer which you reprinted in the last issue of the Spectator. Particularly since it voiced very intelligently an appreciation of your magazine's usefulness to all writers who are consciously engaged in improving motion pictures—and incidentally, themselves.

Unlike other fields of writing, Hollywood affords few candid or dependable sources of criticism by which a writer may benefit by the opinions of capHollywood Spectator Page Five

able and disinterested minds. The only respected critic in Hollywood has always been box-office, and however gratifying it is to ring that bell, there still remains a suspicion with most writers as to whether—and where—their scripts might have been better. These pangs of doubt are short-lived and soon forgotten under the pressure of the next assignment, and so remain forever unanswered. Nothing is learned, and faulty writing becomes grooved with practice. For this reason alone, I feel that the Spectator

For this reason alone, I feel that the Spectator should be read and supported by writers who are interested in the mechanics of their trade, and in the encouragement of an editorial policy which gives full credit to the writer's work, while analyzing his problems. Honest and considered criticism is hard enough to get, as it is—and sometimes hard to swallow. But it is still the best remedy for loose writing, and the doctor ought to be worth his fee.

ROBERT H. BUCKNER.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

CINEMATIC MASTERPIECE . . .

• OF HUMAN HEARTS; MGM; producer, John W. Considine, Ir..; director, Clarence Brown; story, Honore Morrow; screen play, Bradbury Foote; photographer, Clyde DeVinna; montage effects, Slavko Vorkapich; music score, Herbert Stothart; film editor, Frank E. Hull. Cast: Walter Huston, James Stewart, Gene Reynolds, Beulah Bondi, Guy Kibbee, Charles Coburn, John Carradine, Ann Rutherford, Leatrice Joy Gilbert, Charley Grapewin, Leona Roberts, Gene Lockhart, Clem Bevans, Arthur Aylesworth, Sterling Holloway, Charles Peck, Robert McWade, Minor Watson.

RULY a great picture. A human document which I dignifies the medium recording it; the biography of a family—a preacher with the early Victorian conception of religion; a mother, loyal, loving, patient, brave; a son, worthily ambitious, shamefully thoughtless. The time: preceding and during the Civil War. The place: a hamlet on a river's bank, set among rolling hills, a primitive place, its population consisting of ordinary, normal people, about the same, I imagine, as your progenitors and mine who were their contemporaries. With this material Clarence Brown has woven a tale of no great importance as a tale, as it deals only with people of no great importance; has woven it simply, quietly; stresses no points with cinematic tricks; but its very simplicity, its honesty, its completeness, sends surging through it an emotional strain which makes Of Human Hearts one of the great things the screen has done. Perhaps it lacks all the ingredients which make for universal popularity, but those who share the opinion that the most interesting study of mankind is man, will find it satisfying.

Clarence Brown's Great Direction . . .

GLAMOUR, upon which so many Hollywood productions depend for their box-office value, is lacking here, but humanity looms large in its make-up. We follow it with our feelings, yielding to its bid for our emotional reaction, extending our sympathy to the people whose lives it records, sorrowing with

them, rejoicing with them, laughing at times, with tears in our eyes at times, always moved profoundly; but even the friendly preview audience did not disturb the quietness of its content with what it was viewing with the bursts of applause which commonly punctuate first showings. The silence was a tribute to the gentleness of its emotional appeal and the masterly manner in which Clarence Brown tells the story. It is great direction. Even the characters who speak but few lines, who have no direct connection with the trend of the story, are as sharply etched, as definitely outlined as those who have most to do. It is direction which produces only authentic portrayals, which fills the picture with people, not with players, people who live their lives within our range of vision without revealing consciousness of our presence. The audience is impressed because no attempt is made to impress it. Of Human Hearts reveals all the mechanical smoothness which characterizes every picture Clarence directs; the movement of his players, their exits and entrances, achieving a maximum of effectiveness with a minimum of physical effort. The mood of the story is maintained admirably throughout, a big factor in this being the conversational manner in which lines are read.

Series of Great Performances . . .

NO PICTURE ever has given us a series of more convincing performances. The response to the sympathetic direction has been so complete that it is impossible to believe that anyone else could have been as satisfying in any particular part. Only Walter Huston, we feel, could be the preacher, only Beulah Bondi his wife, and only James Stewart his son. We have been trained long since to expect only superb performances from Walter and Miss Bondi when they have parts which provide scope for their talents. Here they have such scope, and they make the most of it. Jimmie Stewart tells me I wrote the first warmly laudatory tribute he received upon entering pictures. It was prompted by a minor part he played in Rose Marie. Since then he has justified the prophesy I made that he would go far on the screen. His Of Human Hearts performance is another forward step, a brilliant characterization which stamps him as one who is on his way to becoming one of the screen's really great actors. His is a type which lasts—not the pretty-boy type which fades out when youth slides back. His personality, a permanent asset, made him ideal casting for the part he plays in Of Human Hearts.

Interesting Directorial Problem . . .

ONE of the most interesting features of Clarence Brown's direction was his molding of the character of the boy who plays Stewart as a child. Gene Reynolds is the lad who plays it. In his direction of the boy, Clarence had to be governed, not by the boy himself, but by how much of the boy would be revealed in Jimmie after the transition caused by the lapse of time. It required nice direction. That is what it gets. When Jimmie appears he is exactly the kind of young man we would expect the boy Gene to become. That means, too, that the boy's per-

formance had to be perfect, and perfect it is. A strikingly effective performance, quiet, unobtrusive and easy to be overlooked, is that of Gene Lockhart. As the self-effacing hospital handy-man, he contributes a gem of thoughtful acting. The late Robert Mc-Wade makes his exit gracefully from the world his histrionic talent had enriched. Death was the final bow he took when he completed his last scene for Of Human Hearts, but it keeps him with us a little longer and earns his memory praise for the work he did before he stepped into the role which will have no ending.

John Carradine As Lincoln . . .

AMONG the many excellent performances, one of the most interesting is that of John Carradine, who portrays Abraham Lincoln in one of the picture's most impressive sequences, a sequence directed beautifully and acted grandly. Carradine's portrayal of the part is another long step in the rapid progress he is making and should earn him other sympathetic parts. Every time he plays a villain it becomes more apparent that he should be given sympathetic roles, but our picture makers so far have been too stupid to realize it. An old favorite of mine whom I last saw in London a score of years ago, is Charles Coburn, who makes in this Metro picture what I believe is his cinematic debut. His work is outstanding. Another interesting newcomer is the daughter of Leatrice Joy and the late Jack Gilbert. Little Leatrice Joy Gilbert has a strikingly musical speaking voice, and hints at talent which can be developed. She plays Ann Rutherford as a child, and Ann herself makes a most favorable impression. Leona Roberts, Guy Kibbee, Charley Grapewin, Sterling Holloway are among others deserving mention.

You Must Not Miss It . . .

TO John W. Considine, Jr., goes endless credit for achieving such satisfactory results in the way of production. A big factor in the success of the picture must have been his hand at the tiller which shaped its physical course. Bradbury Foote's screen play makes the most of the values in the book, reduces dialogue to its essentials and recognizes the right of the camera to participate in the telling of the story. The only fault I can find with the script is that in two spots it seems to end the picture, each time having to lift the audience when it gets under way again. Visually the production is outstanding, its rural setting being pictorially attractive and permitting the camera of Clyde de Vinna to bring many beautiful scenes to the screen. Frank Hull's film editing also rates praise. Dolly Tree, in designing gowns to match the period of the story and the humble station of the women who wore them, must have enjoyed her departure from the high-society world which demands so much of her time and designing talent. But I imagine as much thought must be given the garb of a poor farmer's wife of three-quarters of a century ago as is given the gown of the banker's wife of today. And before being led into the discussion of anything else I know nothing about, I will end with this word of advice: Under no circumstances miss seeing Of Human Hearts.

LESSON IN HOW TO DIRECT . . .

● PENITENTIARY: Columbia: associate producer, Robert North; director, John Brahm: screen play, Fred Niblo, Jr., Seton I. Miller; story, Martin Flavin; photography, Lucien Ballard: film editor, Viola Lawrence: art director, Stephen Goosson; musical director, Morris Stoloff, Cast: Walter Connolly, John Howard, Jean Parker, Robert Barrat, Marc Lawrence, Arthur Hohl, Dick Curtis, Paul Fix, Marjorie Main, Edward Van Sloan, Ann Doran, Richard Elliott, Charles Halton.

T LAST a text book on talkie direction. If you A have been a reader of the Spectator for even only a few months, you are aware of its ideas on how talkies should be made—heaven knows they are repeated often enough—but if you want to see them exemplified, drop into Pantages Theatre this weekend and see Penitentiary, a Columbia picture directed by John Brahm. The name of the director was new to me when it appeared on the screen at the preview, but after the picture was run I inquired about him; discovered he is a young German-partly bald, my informant told me without explaining what that had to do with what we were talking about-and had directed one other picture, Counsellor-At-Law, since coming here. I did not see it, but now I want to. If there is any other direction going around like that in Penitentiary, I want to see it. The title of his new picture and its lack of outstanding star names will keep it from being a great box-office success, but to the personnel of the film industry and the hundreds of Motion Picture Appreciation classes which use the Spectator in their studies, I heartily recommend it as an object of study.

Sticks to Telling His Story . . .

BRAHM seems to realize that all the audience is interested in is the unfolding of the story, that it is not interested in acting, declamation or that greatest demonstration of picture-making ineptitude—the injection of "comedy relief" to destroy the mood of a dramatic story. His expression is fluid; with no evidence of haste—he makes his story move rapidly; carries us along with it, keeps us interested in it by virtue of dragging in nothing to distract our attention from it. There are no actors in Penitentiary; there are just some people who become involved in a stirring human drama; and Brahm takes us into the middle of it, brings us into intimate contact with it until our interest is aroused and our sympathies enlisted on behalf of the characters whom we feel deserve them. His direction reveals no effort to attract our attention, gives no indication that a director had anything to do with the picture. In a sequence in which Marc Lawrence kills Paul Fix, there is superb direction. No lines are spoken, the drama being developed by action and composition, and the murder itself is committed off-stage behind a portiere which we see swaying. All through the production the dialogue is presented as conversations carried on in natural tones, thereby constituting an object lesson

ninety per cent of the old established Hollywood directors need so badly.

Evenly Balanced Performances . . .

THE story itself is a drab one. Except for a few opening scenes it is told entirely within the walls of a large penitentiary. The script is a matter-offact document, well suited to the kind of direction Brahm gives it. Speeches are short, to the point, and offer no opportunities for oratory. I have seen most of the prison pictures presented during the past decade, but none which matches this one for sheer force in developing drama with so little evidence of obvious effort. A natural result of the direction is a series of the most evenly balanced performances I ever saw in any picture. The performance of Ward Bond, who is on the screen for less than one minute and who is not listed in the cast, is as creditable, as smooth and convincing as that of Walter Connolly, the leading character who is almost constantly before the camera and who never gave a better performance. John Howard, who was somewhat awkward the last time I had seen him on the screen, responds to Brahm's direction with a performance which develops all the values of his part. Jean Parker, whose last previous appearance I did not like at all, is here just a nice, appealing girl who takes her big emotional scene just as we would expect such a girl to take it. She does nothing to remind us she is playing a part, that she is an actress being told by a director what to do.

All Bits Receive Attention . . .

ANY picture is just a series of bits strung together to form the whole, the majority of the bits being contributed by the leading players who receive the chief attention of the director. The main weakness of the majority of pictures is the lack of conviction in the isolated bits, the lack of harmony between the brief appearances of unknown players and the extended ones of the principal players. Penitentiary has no such weakness. There are many other cases like that of Ward Bond, whom I mention because I happen to recall his name. There are at least a score of others who are as deserving of individual mention for having contributed brief flashes of acting which were pieces of perfection worked into the perfect acting pattern. And still I adhere to the Spectator's oft repeated claim that the screen is not an acting art. The stage has given us our conception of acting, and pictures have suffered because of having adopted it as its standard. The stage is an art of the projection of a characterization; the screen one of the absorption

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. **OPTOMETRIST**

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of a characterization until the player becomes the person he plays and gives no thought to projection. Brahm demonstrates exactly what I mean. His camera moves through the prison, picking up a bit of business here, a muttered line there; sweeps over a multitude of convicts, looks down upon a surging crowd, looks into Connolly's troubled eyes-in all this activity leading us into and through the story and making no attempt to project the story to us.

Technically a Satisfactory Job . . .

COLUMBIA has mounted the picture effectively, apparently realizing that in Brahm it had a director upon whom it was safe to spend some money. Robert North, one of our pioneer producers, is to be credited with a well done job. Stephen Goosson's penitentiary looks like one—having the quality of making me think so, even though I never have been in one to learn what it looks like. It was no easy matter to photograph the inherently drab scenes, but Lucien Ballard's camera was equal to it. A word of credit, too, is earned by the film editing of Viola Lawrence. The story by Martin Flavin was put into screen play form by Seton I. Miller and Fred Niblo, Jr. I arrive obliquely at the conclusion that the script must have been a commendable piece of screen writing; I at no time was aware I was following something put down on paper. I thought I was viewing life being lived. And I still think I was looking at the most skilfully directed talkie I had ever seen.

WHEN COMPARISON IS INEVITABLE . . .

 A SLIGHT CASE OF MURDER: Warners-First National; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis: associate producer, Sam Bischoff; director, Lloyd Bacon; play, Damon Runyon, Howard Lindsay; screen play, Earl Baldwin, Joseph Schrank; photographer, Sid Hickox; music director, Leo F. Forbstein; film editor, James Gibbon; assistant director, Dick Mayberry. Cast: Edward G. Robinson, Jane Bryan, Allen Jenkins, Ruth Donnelly, Willard Parker, John Litel, Edward Brophy, Harold Huber, Eric Stanley, Paul Harvey, Bobby Jordan, Joe Downing, Margaret Hamilton, George E. Stone, Bert Hanlon, Jean Benedict, Harry Seymour, Betty Compson, Joe Caites, George Lloyd, John Harron, Duke York, Pat Daly, Harry Tenbrook.

THE next picture I saw after viewing Penitentiary (see preceding review) was A Slight Case of Murder. This brought into bold relief the differences between the direction given each. If the Warner picture had been directed as brilliantly as the one from Columbia studio, it would have been another My Man Godfrey or The Awful Truth. The script had everything, the story being a comedy of situations told against the rather unusual background of a quartette of murders. Earl Baldwin and Joseph Schrank worked the stage play into a competent screen play; Sam Bischoff gave it a complete and appropriate production and an entirely capable cast. Director Lloyd Bacon therefore had everything essential to the making of a scintillating comedy which would have been among the season's greatest box-office winners. But it comes to the screen as just a run-of-mill comedy of the conventional Hollywood sort, one worth seeing for what it is, even though it falls far short of what it might have been. I was so inured to the standard brand of Hollywood direction—perhaps so hopeless of its improvement—that if the Columbia picture had not exemplified so convincingly the Spectator's conception of what constitutes wholly intelligent direction, I no doubt would have credited Bacon with having done a good job. As I viewed it I enjoyed several good laughs, but they were caused by the situations more than by the way in which they were directed.

Dialogue Poorly Directed . . .

THE Warner production in no way resembles a motion picture. It is a photographed play which talks its way from fade-in to fade-out. All the talk is in the same loud key, all the story being put over in words delivered automatically and with little help from vocal shading and without expression consistent with the mood of scenes, just as lines are being read in nearly all the pictures Hollywood is producing. I am aware it probably would be more fair to review A Slight Cast of Murder on its own merits instead of comparing it with Penitentiary, but I will have to give the influence of the Brahm picture a little more time to wear off before it ceases to be the standard by which I estimate the virtues of the others I see. Scores of times in the Spectator I have urged directors to treat dialogue scenes for what they areconversations between characters, not elocutionary efforts to project thoughts across footlights. In Penitentiary characters talk to one another; in A Slight Case of Murder, they talk to the wide, wide world, thus robbing it of that intimate, personal appeal a picture must have to be wholly successful. The significance of many of the scenes demanded that the lines be read in tones too low to be overheard by possible eavesdroppers, but the direction was the same in such scenes as in nearly all the others. John Litel, whose part is not a big one, is the only member of the cast who apparently was permitted to converse instead of declaim.

Most Amusing Comedy . . .

CDDIE ROBINSON has a part tailored to his measure, that of a racketeer whom the repeal of prohibition reformed. He responds to the direction given him with his usual great skill, but his performance could have been one to gain a place among screen classics if he had been permitted to speak softly, to say much less in words and leave much more to the camera to record. Judged by the prevailing talkie standards, all the performances are satisfactory. Sam Bischoff saw to it that types were chosen wisely to fit the various parts. It is an hilarious picture, even though it revolves largely around the fact that four recently created corpses are sojourning in an upstars bedroom of Eddie's country home. The funniest part of the picture is the effort to distribute the corpses in spots to cause the most annoyance to people Eddie dislikes most; rather odd material for comedy, but as presented it really becomes extremely funny without taking liberties with good taste. Do not let my opinion of what it might have been, deprive you of the entertainment you will get from the

picture as it is. It certainly is worthwhile, although

—. But I see I already have said it.

MORE RIDIN' AND SHOOTIN' . . .

◆ CASSIDY OF BAR 20; Paramount release produced by Harry Sherman; directed by Lesley Selander; screen play by Norman Houston; based on a story by Clarence E. Mulford; production manager, Eugene Strong; photographed by Russell Harlan; sound by Earl Sitar; film editor, Sherman Rose; art direction by Lewis Rachmil; wardrobe by Earl Moser; assistant directors, D. M. Abrahams and Theo Joos. Cast: William Boyd, Frank Darien, Russell Hayden, Nora Lane, Robert Fiske, John Elliott, Margaret Marquis, Gertrude W. Hoffman, Carleton Young, Gordon Hart, Edward Cassidy.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

FRIDAY night is evidently a sort of weekly Halloween at the Stadium Theatre, an occasion when the adolescents of the neighborhood forgather to take a fling at life and generally to give expression to their exuberance at being released from the academic bondage of the preceding days. They are disposed to take nothing seriously; on the contrary, they set themselves up as scrutinous debunkers and welcome any presentment on the screen that affords them opportunity for mockery or guffaws. Even England's turbaned Egyptian gunners and the distraught Spanish refugees of the newsreel failed to conform to their concepts of what goings-on in the world should look like. Similarly, their reception of Cassidy of Bar 20 was so irregular that I fear my critical machinery was jarred somewhat out of focus. However, I think it significant that the rest of the audience, led, of course, by the ringleaders, indulged in not a little snickering or laughter themselves. There was a rather unanimous outburst where Cassidy enters a room full of men who have been fiercely firing their guns out of the windows, shouts, "Drop your guns!", and every man obediently puts up his hands. There undoubtedly is some naive stuff in Cassidy of Bar 20, naive even when the film is compared with other Westerns I have seen recently. And this is rather a pity, for there are many portions of the picture that are human and appealing, some of the scenes are well acted, and the production values are good.

Humanized Westerns Might Go . . .

OPALONG CASSIDY is a character having n qualities which could make him a sort of figure against the sky, a legendary fellow, in western pictures, if he is placed in more believable situations and a little more thought is given to his behavior and speech. Doubtless somewhere audiences can be found who are naive enough to take the present film seriously; but I refuse to believe that the same audiences would not come to feel greater esteem or affection for the character if he were presented in a more convincing way. Other levels of movie-goers, too, might then take to the series. William Boyd is well cast as Cassidy and his quiet style of playing is agreeable. Gertrude W. Hoffmann gives a performance outstanding for its vitalism, and young Margaret Marquis also plays with vigor, presenting something new in the way of a cowgirl. Frank Darien, Russell Hayden, Carleton Young are among others who are good performers. Lesley Selander has directed with considerable vitality and a sense for characterization; the worst scenes of the script he has at least handled with restraint. Russell Harlan's photography is first-rate and includes a tinted treatment of the closing shot which was interesting.

HERE'S HOLLYWOOD IN THE RAW . . .

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

LAIRE PARRISH'S current play at the Spotlight Theatre, 1011 North Cole Avenue, North of Sunset, is movie fodder if ever there was any. The drama is one of Hollywood, seen from the side street rooming house and not from the forecourt of Grauman's Chinese. If Hollywood had applause for Stand In and A Star Is Born there should be cannon salvoes for this script. There may be some producers interested in lifting the curtain once again on the movieland scene; I believe they need travel no further than here. In the boarding house live a crosssection of Hollywood people. Two movie-struck kids, a shoestring agent, an auditing clerk, a teacher, a writer, an Iowa farmer and his wife, an autograph hound, a beer parlor saxophonist, an extra, a tired housewife anxious to return home, an old-time director. The pinnacle of success to each of them except the Iowa farmer and his daughter-in-law, the house wife, is his name on marquee lights. The play recites the struggles, hopes and frustrations of them all. Not a pleasant picture, but one that is real enough. One that should serve to deter movie-struck parents and people all over to stay at home and take part in the church strawberry festival, and let things go at that. Acting Is Excellent . . .

DURING the course of my reviewing for the Spectator I like to interlard my films with an occasional play. I go to see all the Federal Project plays and as many little theatre plays as I can. Of the latter there is little I can say in honest praise. Bad staging, bad direction, bad acting and bad scripts alienate me from saying anything praiseworthy. Yet, I honestly feel that North of Sunset is one of the best little theatre presentations I have seen. This due in no small measure to the dramatic efforts of Terry Frost as the fourflushing son, who would rather starve as an unemployed actor than work as anything else; Lucille Edmonds as his movie-struck sister who attains success the easiest way; John H. Weaver as her long-suffering husband; and Vera Paul as the successful young writer. Direction by Leon Lord was excellent and the size of the cast and the stage itself represented almost insurmountable handicaps to any amateur performance.

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CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of

MABEL KEEFER

AH, me! . . . (How on earth does one put a sigh on paper?) I seem to be in a sort of "Would God I were a tender apple blossom" mood. There is a Chinese proverb: "The apple blossom is so much more beautiful than the dumpling." But even if I am not an apple blossom, neither am I a dumpling—yet. I should not like to live in a world without apple blossoms, but I should miss the dumplings too. I can even imagine situations where a light, fluffy dumpling would really have more appeal than a tender apple blossom.

PEGASUS refuses to rise tonight; he ambles heavily along... Maybe there is something wrong with his wing-spread.

TIME out while I grind my teeth in rage as "The Donkey's Serenade," from Firefly, comes over the radio, done-heaven help us-in swingtime! Why, oh why, should that joyous, lilting thing be played in swingtime? If they must have swing, why don't they write their own music? And now, they are murdering the lovely swaying rhythm of "There's a Song in My Heart—" Gr-r-r-r!... Pegasus has turned into a dragon, breathing forth fire and smoke -something altogether unlovely-so I might as well put the cover on my typewriter and go to bed. . . . But then, it was time to stop anyway. . . . And furthermore, why should I let an ugly dragon get me down? I shall change him back into a beautiful white winged steed, just by the simple process of recalling the dancing boy and his joyous piping; the donkeys trotting in rhythm with the music; Jeanette MacDonald in the swaying coach, and Allan Jones singing "There's a Song in My Heart. . . ." Hm-m, hm, hm-m—hm-m, hm, hm-m....

WHY is it, I wonder, that when someone pleads for more "realism" in plays and on the screen, he seems always to mean something disagreeable—something fraught with bitterness, fear and hate? Pleasant, even joyful things happen in real life and why is not that realism? . . . If we have a pattern held up before us continually, we are sure, eventually, to conform to it to a certain degree; therefore it would seem that it might be profitable to devote less time to things as they are, and more time to things as they should be. It is tiresome to hear people say: "Human nature always has been the same, and always will be!" That is one of those dangerous halftruths. It is true in regard to the fundamentals of human nature, but that does not mean that it cannot be guided and developed into something higher and better. We all know what science has achieved in the advancement of material things, but scientists could just as easily have said: "It has always been thus and so—there is nothing to be done about it." Suppose Stokowski, instead of striving to perfect the recording of orchestral music on the sound track, so as to achieve a proper tone balance, had said: "The recording of orchestral music on the sound track is bad, but that is the way it is and we must give it to the public that way." Perhaps we should make a study of how to make fairy tales come true, so that we will have less time for telling ourselves that there are no such things as fairies. . . . But that does not mean that we are to ignore the ills of life in plays and pictures—far from it! We need an occasional story like Dead End to stab us awake to certain ills of society, but it would seem that when that is done we should concentrate on improving conditions, rather than spend too much time bewailing them.

I STILL am thinking about Wells Fargo. . . . It will be a long time before I forget Joel McCrea and Bob Burns in the scene showing the presentation of the plaque—the restrained acting of the two men, and McCrea's face making his silence eloquent.

DAYTONIAN wit and satire are strikingly evident in First Lady, and it irks me when critics and others refer to the play or picture as the Kaufman-Dayton satire. I insist that it is a Dayton-Kaufman satire. Katharine Dayton, with the wit and humor of her writing, is one of the reasons why I maintain that we owe a tremendous debt to those writers who keep us amused and grinning, thereby helping us to keep sane in these troublous times.

FANCY reading in the "Mental Meanderings" of the editor of the Spectator, "It is so warm, I am going inside; garden thermometer registers seventy-six," when the thermometer outside my door registers twenty below zero. But he cannot see the beautiful ice formations of the water flowing over our Chuctanunda Creek dam—if that is any comfort to me. . . . And by the time this is printed spring will not "be far behind."

PUBLIC criticism has been called a plan of healthful, hygienic, social plumbing, and it seems to have worked out that way with the film industry, judging from the growing excellence of the pictures presented.

CLARENCE BUDDINGTON KELLAND'S new story, Fugitive Father, is, without question, a screen story. Along with the Kelland humor it has great scenic possibilities if authentic backgrounds are used—that is, within reason. The trailers did cover a good bit of territory. Then, there are a couple of fist fights, the nine little Traubs, and the "Battle Axe," to say nothing of the mystery element. . . . Oh, yes, and the romantic element. . . . And James and John. . . . If I do not soon hear that Fugitive Father has gone into production (and I hope they do not change the name), I shall be quite upset. Hope

to see Mr. Deeds Goes to Town again some time, just for the sake of seeing and hearing Gary Cooper and his tuba. I have a weakness for tubas. Also, for the basses in an orchestra.

As I sat in a concert hall the other night, listening to the second movement of Tschaikowsky's Symphony No. 5, in E minor, and the French horn breathed that beautiful melody, I thought: If only screen musical backgrounds were "breathed" instead of "blared." There are times when crashing music fits the scene, but those occasions are extremely rare, and it seems to me that, ordinarily, even during scenes of excitement and turmoil, musical backgrounds should be kept in the background. If the music has the right character, it will evoke the mood that the scene calls for much more effectively if the audience senses it, but does not consciously hear it.

MEGALOCEPHALIA—what a word! And I have just found out what it means—broadly speaking—a big head. If ever there was any danger of my having one, that danger no longer exists. I shall go to any length to avoid having anything that sounds as that does, and I imagine there would be fewer people with swelled heads if they knew they had megalocephalia.

READING the article, "What!—No Love?" from Film Weekly, London, in the January 22 issue of the Spectator, I notice that The Prince and the Pauper is not included in the list of pictures without a "love-interest," and I particularly remember that, because it was not until two or three days after I had seen the picture that I suddenly realized, to my great surprise, that there was no "love-interest" in it. . . . And I think I know why the "Film Weekly reader wrote a plea for a film about real love." So much of the "love" seen on the screen makes one think of the word "synthetic."

WONDER if there are two men named Howard Hill, in Hollywood? The New York Herald Tribune carries a story about the Howard Hill who is teaching the yeomen to handle long bows for Warner Brothers' picture, The Adventures of Robin Hood, and there is, of course, Howard Hill, Business Manager of the Spectator. The question is, are they one and the same, or, are they two entirely separate entities? But even if Mr. Hill, the business manager, is not Mr. Hill, the archer, they still have something in common, for, after all, the Spectator shoots ideas, and as to hitting the bull's-eye—it never misses. "What, never?" "Well, hardly ever."

SPEAKING of Gilbert & Sullivan—oh., yes, we were!—speaking of Gilbert & Sullivan. I wish that someone would make pictures of all the G. & S. operas and rent the films out in some manner. How would the financial end be handled? Don't ask me—I loathe mathematics!

Hollywood Spectator Page Eleven

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

Making the Award . . .

AM totally ignorant of the persons and rules which govern the awards of the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences. I only know that they have had grief aplenty. I sympathize with them. I long since have refused to sit on a musical jury and give prizes. I have been too unhappy during and after the deliberations. I have been forced to make my conditions of jury service so exacting, in order to reach a fair judgment, that I am now a forgotten man. I would be curious to know how the Academy reaches a conclusion regarding the best score. And from what angle do the judges determine what constitutes the best score? Music as an integral part of the film production as whole? Or is film score judged upon its intrinsic musical values? Is it a matter of classifying gay musicals or films with subtle background music, or one of those in-between hybrids? Will Mr. Composer have to allow himself to be compared with Mr. Compiler who lines them up dead or alive, from Chopin and Wagner to Tschaikowsky and Rachmaninoff? Is Mr. Song Writer to compete with Mr. Aria-Snatcher who sits on a pile of opera scores from Rossini to Puccini? And, to ask another question, who will be the men and women of the jury? Musicians employed in studios? Music Department heads? Who, if I may ask, gentlemen of the Academy? Music is becoming more and more important in the making of good pictures. These are vital questions, and I have thought of only a few. It is easier to answer them before than after the award or awards are made.

Entertainment and Art . . .

NOT being called upon by the editor to deliver a statement on the functions or aspects of the motion picture, I am in a state of inhibition. Mr. Beaton will forgive me if I see the motion picture as entertainment, again as an art. Last but not least, the film can be a social force against all gangsterism, from the hoodlum variety of economic vermin to the tophatted foreign office racketeer, the latter dealing in the lives and fortunes of nations. Entertainment can be art and vice versa. The film is less likely to be art, if it is entertainment at any price, or shall I say at any length? The film could be artistically more balanced and still be good entertainment. Mr. Beaton has written so forcefully on its powers as a moral agency, that there is no need of discussing this aspect of a necessarily commercial or mercantile activity. The film, as a collective activity, is a colossal industry, with huge investments, huge payroll responsibilities from the sidewalk doorman in front of a theatre to the president of a studio corporation. The same pulse drives the economic life blood through the huge body of this cinematic industry, although economic security is not the same. The high-placed studio financier in his innermost sanctum, is situated

differently from our colorful sidewalk worker in his fancy uniform of high-admiral of the Swiss mountain-navy. For his sake, for his continued wearing of the uniform, I am willing to allot at least fifty-one per cent of controlling votes to those who look at the film as entertainment. They may keep my doorman employed.

Matter of Taste . . .

AM well aware that filmdom must function as an entertainment industry. Commitment in terms of investments and required output demand a fairly steady and fast pace of production. Radio surveys conducted by Fortune show that more than half of the public like classical as well as popular music. Only one-third of the radio voters preferred light music exclusively. Still, entertainment must be furnished by the film, even for those who insist on Brahms for breakfast and who must have their Bach in B minor before going to bed. By all means provide entertainment. The world was never more in need to laugh off its tension. Bernard Shaw, when writing music criticism, once contended that all the preparation needed for enjoying Wagner's super music-drama, Tristan and Isolde, was to have had one great love affair. If that be so, then I can well understand why impresarios do not regard this opera as good box-office.

Unevenly Dipped . . .

THAT would also explain the rather general crav-I ing for the kind of love songs one hears in the Goldwyn Follies of 1938, and in Warner Brothers' Hotel Hollywood. They remind me of those cutrate drug store chocolates in cellophane bags, half a pound for ten cents, sweet, unevenly brown at the base. In the language of the trade, they are classified as "unevenly dipped." But I presume the songs in these two shows supply a certain vicarious experience of romance. Musically they are not worth much. They are unevenly dipped, emotionally. Having operated once a candy-making machine in days of emergency, I know about chocolates. They must be of even chocolate coating, neither too little nor too much. There must be the proper proportion of glucose, sugar and whatever flavor desired. Proper proportion is important. I had to think of that the other day when I listened to them recording for a Mexican film. A certain woman singer, greatly advanced in salary because of her hotcha or torchy style of singing (quite Negroic), sang a charmingly Spanish-Mexican love song with that incongruous approach. It will be entertainment to hear, but not good entertainment. Unevenly dipped, too.

The Blue Guitar . . .

CAME away puzzled by the musical welter of Mr. Goldwyn's Follies of current vintage. (Musically young wine, bottled too early.) Two days later I attended Hollywood Hotel and nearly broke down

under its more and bigger process of tonal entertainment. Staleness of lyrics was to be blamed perhaps for staleness of tunes. One versifier rhymes "fan" with "Sally Rand." These things call for an antidote, and I will share it with my likely fellowsufferers:

The man bent over his guitar. A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They said: "You have a blue guitar, You do not play things as they are.'

The man replied: "Things as they are Are changed upon the blue guitar.'

And they said then: "But play, you must, A tune beyond us, yet ourselves.

A tune upon the blue guitar Of things exactly as they are."

I wish I had written this neat bit of philosophic sarcasm, so that I could dedicate it to certain producers. But the poem is not mine. It opens a book of verse, called The Man with the Blue Guitar, by Wallace Steven, and Alfred Knopf is the publisher. Some day a film director will come upon a blue guitar and play a tune beyond us, yet ourselves. He need not be afraid of the color of the guitar and its individual sound.

It Is Quite Amazing . . .

MR. WELFORD BEATON, being an ideal editor does not expect his hirelings to agree with him. As Producer Merlin in Mr. Goldwyn's recently previewed Follies of 1938 admits repeatedly: It is amazing. The latest Goldwyn product provides much which might have come from the juicy brush of a Maxfield Parrish, or, by way of contrast, from a high-fidelity realist whose stark economy of pigment is just as fascinating in its fetish of optic facts. But the editor has had his say on that score. It is not my business to discuss the story or the players. I can only regret that Sam Goldwyn's ear is not as good as his eye. If he had been one of us the other night, as we were trundled up into Projection Room No. 2 of his spick and span studio plant, and had the music blasted at him, he might be wondering. I kept my head up because of the quite exceptional ballet girls, but batted my ear funnels down.

Storm-Warning Volume . . .

MUSIC critic hard of hearing is nothing new, A and in Hollywood he would not be at a loss. But a music critic, without the outward equipment of his nefarious trade, would appear like a picture director without a checkered coat. I have used up my expressions of protest against over-loud sound. The neatly hitting Frank S. Nugent of the New York Herald Tribune, however, possesses an ampler vocabulary. Upon a similar occasion he gasps of the sound track being "worked up into storm-warning volume." Whether some misguided soul was stepping up volume or whether the recording is made that way, almost invariably when Kenny Baker or Helen Jepson delivered a song, the orchestral accompaniment be-

came massive, heavy as molasses, and detracted from the solo effect.

Still Amazing . . .

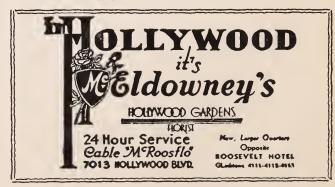
FIND it difficult to discuss the Goldwynian Follies (no innuendo intended), and that for the reason that no credit sheets were available. (The least reward a studio might grant a reviewer braving a heavy rain.) In a general way, it is not difficult to differentiate between the spontaneous music of the late George Gershwin and the manufactured tunes of Vernon Duke. (When in New York he calls himself Dukelsky and the Philharmonic Symphony plays his fugues.) The woods of tin-pan alley and of Hollywood are thick with the kind of songs Vernon Duke put in the mouth of an accordion player, of the casting director's sweetheart. Kenny Baker's first appearance and his nice, resonant voice and natural singing called for something more individual than Duke dictated. His ballet music is of the same obviously popular or sophisticated type.

Helen Jepson Superb . . .

THE second ballet sequence had more quality than I the first, but then it suggested the treatment made famous by Ravel in La Valse. The music for the water nymph had more calibre, and the funny stuff for the Ritz Brothers had punch and pace, but that is as far as it went. Orchestrations on the whole were obvious. But whatever the musical disappointments, the singing of Helen Jepson in excerpts from Traviata sounded superb. Recordings were excellent and her voice seemed flawless and well suited for this type of reproduction. Of course, I suffered from volume, something one does not mind quite so much during the highly humorous Serenade to a Fish, one of the best laugh-getters. But I am still puzzled by the lack of balance between visual and musical elements of this film. The former luxurious and ingenious, the latter turned out well according to the rules, but hardly more than that. It is amazing.

No Reservations . . .

NO RESERVATIONS stood in the way, it would seem, of buying the best and the biggest as far as music was concerned for Hollywood Hotel. I saw this super-super musical after another Warner Brothers' picture, A Slight Case of Murder, which proved to be delightfully innocent of musical pretense. Almost unending gales of laughter from the audience



provided the right background sound. But then came Hollywood Hotel. The theatre manager could not provide me with a program, but I am sure I am correct in crediting Ray Heindorf with the orchestral arrangements, Richard Whiting and Johnny Mercer with music and lyrics. In order to summarize my reactions I must borrow once more from the clever dialogue of the Goldwyn Follies. I think it is Eddie Bergen's Charlie McCarthy who croaks: "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." I do not apply this to Messrs. Whiting, Mercer and the hard-worked Ray Heindorf, but to Producer Wallis and Director Berkeley, or to the scripters.

Is Becoming Childish . . .

IT IS becoming more than tiresome to see another band photographed ad nauseam, to see another leader strutting his stuff before the camera. This unreserved imitation of what Boris Morros introduced to the screen in Paramount's Big Broadcast of 1937 two years ago is becoming childish. Last week I saw it in Twentieth Century-Fox Happy Landing, when it was done with zest and some new as well as capitivating tricks. In Hollywood Hotel Benny Goodman and his band are photographed collectively, individually, piecemeal, without playing their best. Soon afterwards a greatly augmented band is photographed with a palpable attempt at imitating what Morris did with Stokowski and the Philadelphia Symphony, showing the various players, entire groups, and the hand-waving maestro. Such unreserved imitation also indicates lack of ideas.

Sit and Sing . . .

WITH Hollywood Hotel Warner Brothers have retrogressed musically. The picture on a whole is of the "sit and sing" recipe. A bench means a tune, although Dick Powell stands up at times when he sings, and sings with a very agreeable voice, enjoyably free from the gastric methods of huskytoned bearers of torchy tidings. Generally speaking, one finds too much of the original Martha Raye style of breathless tone-whacking, the thing which unfailingly ends with a tootle-de-do—de-do—deedle-di-da. This is true not only of Hollywood Hotel, which begins lively and engaging enough in a properly light vein. There occurs a charming waltz tune for the first lobby scene. Some of the fast changing music reminded me of the rapid-change method of Forty-Second Street. The Orchid Room music, to grow colloquial, sounded swell in the accepted fashion. Perhaps I should be satisfied.

Singing Scene Too Long . . .

THE songs, nice little tunes, sounded a well known formula. First sung standing, then came a long bench, for two, of course. Eventually we are taken to the Hollywood Bowl at midnight. Someone sings, with orchestra, despite the unusual hour, and Dick Powell makes the motions of a conductor, all in good faith. There is a seemingly endless singing scene at the drive-in sandwich stand where everybody chirps in. If the director does not have enough

dramatic sense to realize the lengthiness of this scene, why did not someone tell him that musically the whole business is worked threadbear? Nothing shoddy about the super-super-super arrangement of Russian Eyes, simple little Slavic gypsy tune done by a triple-stuffed orchestra and stentorian chorus. I hope this happened just once in a life-time. Post-script: Paige can do excellently with a mob one-third the size of this one.

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

WELL, WELL! . . .

HMN. And other such expressions. I have seen my first, the reference being to those new commercial films which Jam Hardy proposes to unload upon an unsuspecting public. Yep, I was inveigled by the mater—the old trick of a chocolate pie-into escourting her to a small neighborhood house to see a favorite child cutie, and there was the Hardy opus. At first I thought the theatre manager had miraculously dedeveloped a social sense and was bent on instructing his audiences. Naval maneuvers are shown, in which aeroplanes attempt to drop bombs on an old battleship, evidently a difficult mark to hit. Presently we are shown the deck of a new battleship, and the narrator informs us that even if a bomb did hit the top of one of the latest model ships, little damage would likely be done because of the protection scientific engineering affords the ship. About the only place where the lighting of a bomb really could disable a ship would be along its sides; and the chances of a missile from the air landing in such a happy position are not very great. Moreover, while the planes endeavor to hit the bull's-eye, an array of big guns is trained on them. So, you see, the battleship is not nearly as outmoded as an instrument of warfare as some have believed it to be, nor the aeroplane as formidable a one in naval tactics. Very informative.

Wonders of Science Revealed . . .

THEN the narrator goes on to explain why it is that the turrets of the big guns, their covers, that is, which occupy a good deal of the deck space, are invulnerable. They are made of the hardest steel and built on the principle of support such as is found in the dome. Here the narrator materializes, standing before a large drawing board, and proceeds to demonstrate with a crayon just how it all works out, how the corners are rounded to give extra support, and the like. A bomb could go "boom" right on top of the turret and nothing much would happen. In fact, such a scene is acted out, thanks to the cooperation of the United States Navy. Then smoothly the fellow glides into another illustration of this engineering principle. It seems that science has now advanced so far that the principle of this turret is being applied to the making of automobiles. In fact, since we are so interested, he will demonstrate just how the principle works in automobiles. We are taken on a field to meet a heavy-helmeted fellow, "Hell-Defying" Ike or somebody, who hops into an automobile, gets up a terrific speed, and then deliberately swings the car about so that it rolls over four or five times. Well, when the car is put on its wheels again, the top, thanks to the advance of science, is scarcely even scratched, and Ike sticks out his head from beneath it and says, "Hi, folks," or something. That is all there is to it. The catch is this—anyone but a third-rate moron could see that the car was a Chevrolet! Ah, me. And other such expressions. Or again, what is the world coming to?

Resentment Ensues . . .

THE mater said, "Aw . . ." I think the rest of the audience felt the same reaction. We had been tricked, subjected to insidious advertising propaganda after we had paid money to be entertained. It is true that the picture provided us with an interesting bit of information, but this did not compensate for the fact that the film's intention was to dupe us. Wherever such pictures are shown, at least in any regular payas-you-enter picture houses, they are going to meet with the problem of audience resentment. The only regular theatres where films of this sort might not incure resentment are some dingy houses where the average spectator's mind is so vacuous and time hangs so heavily on his hands, that he will look at anything. And such persons are not good prospective buyers. On the other hand, if Hardy wanted to risk being straight-forward with his audiences, letting them know that he is out to advertise a product, but offering them a good show in return for their attention, he might build up respect for his pictures, might even make them welcome. Incidently, the brunt of the resentment felt by audiences falls on the head of the exhibitor. The fellow who showed this film was already running an eye-straining four-hour bill, so that he did not need the extra short subject. The fact that he chose to run it indicates faulty showmanship. Which probably explains why he is almost nightly giving away half his profits in Keeno games.

IS CLEVER EXPLOITATION . . .

EXEMPLARY cleverness is contained in the trailer for Live, Love, and Learn, Metro film. A complete little story is told, with witty Bob Benchley as the protagonist. Setting behind a table with two reels of film on spindles before him, his pretense that he is editing the film forms a setting for the interpolation of various scenes from it. As a climax Benchley becomes entangled in the strips of celluloid, gets too near a flame, and ends up a highly sizzled fellow. Not only are audiences entertained while the "plug" is in progress, but Live, Love and Learn becomes impressed upon their minds more forcibly than it could be by probably any other cinematic means. It is all a matter of association. The skit they remember, and along with it the name and nature of the feature picture.

CAMERA ANGLES

By Robert Joseph

FILMS IN NAZI GERMANY . . .

THOSE of us in Hollywood who feel a little bitter A about our jobs in any of the thousands of ways a man feels disgruntled in such matters, can take a look at the film industry in Germany and reconsider. Aside from the fact that film production is at its lowest ebb numerically and financially, the German film considered from esthetic and technical points of view is also bankrupt. In order to give the lads an occasional hypo, Minister Goebbels commissions his wards to spew out a little text titled Film-Culture, Film Cohen, Film Corruption. The book attempts to indicate that up to 1933 a vicious Jewish syndicate was undermining the German picture industry. Only the Hitler revolution saved the cinematic day. Citing illustrations of immoral and moral films and unethical business practices, the book condemns all pictures made before the Nazi rise to power. Evidently the editors forgot for the moment that their present demi-god, Emil Jannings, did his best work in those terrible days. The Last Laugh, Variety and Tartuffe are unfortunate examples of the alleged corruption. So are Fritz Lang's Siegfried and M.

Why Regard German Feelings . . .

IT IS futile to resort to logic and common sense in evaluating anything fascist; but when it comes to American film policy one expects sound reasoning. With the above as a single example of a thousand and one Nazi stupidities, why do American film producers take such pains not to offend Germany? The Road Back turned up as a comedy instead of a preachment against war; the alleged reason for the change was Nazi persuasion. The suggestion offered here that Hollywood make a strong anti-war picture is met with a somewhat patronizing silence by important film figures. All company foreign sales departments are afraid such a motion picture would alienate Germany, Italy, Roumania, Japan, Turkey, Yugo Slavia, Hungary, now Brazil and even Quigley Publications.

A Little More Foreign News . . .

A RATHER anomalous situation exists as far as the Institute of Educational Films is concerned. Founded in 1927 by a hopeful League of Nations, the Institute was somewhat oddly housed in fascist Italy. Dictatorship and academic liberalism mix like oil and water, which may account in some measure for the notorious inactivity of the Institute. The Institute it was which gave Ecstasy a clean bill of health at the Venice Exposition. With proper administration such an organization could do much to unite nations for the furtherance of film art and film technique, and it should be hoped that Italy's League withdrawal does not spell an end to the Institute.

Switzerland, known for its disarmament conferences and cheese, has been suggested as the logical country to take over the organization. Perhaps under the happier and more liberal aegis of a free Switzerland, the Institute can function in the service of screen art.

And from Mexico . . .

AN INTERESTING experiment in government aided films is taking place within the stages of Talisman Studios. There Mexico's number one producer-director, Miguel C. Torres, is shooting the American version of his ambitious screen project, Maxmilian and Carlotta. The Austrian Archduke was no hero to the Mexican people whom he allegedly liberated, and yet the script of Torres' current effort calls for a kindly and sympathetic Maxmilian. Under normal circumstances government assistance in picture making results in rousing good propaganda to the eternal credit of the contemporary ruler and his aides. The Mexican Government of Cardenas, however, assisted Torres by opening up the National Museum to him, giving him ten thousand troops and two thousand cavalry, and tearing down anachronis-tic telegraph poles to Mexico City's main thoroughfare for the shooting of Maxmilian's triumphal entry into the Capital. The Empire period was a colorful epoch in Mexico's history, and the opportunity to use it to glorify Cardenas apparently has been sloughed over in the present script. But then some governments can be intelligent.

Leaf from the Past ...

FANFARE and Hollywood heraldry brought Mayerling, the French film, to the Esquire Theatre. Mr. Beaton has commented on the value of this film in his review. A big super two-buck opening introduced Danielle Darrieux and Charles Boyer in this picture about the ill-fated Archduke and his beloved, Marie Vetsera. At the risk of alienating friends and losing influence over people, write me down as saying that Mayerling is not the picture it is supposed to be. The individual performances are excellent. Danielle Darrieux is even more entrancing, even more wistful and delightful than she was in Club de Femmes. Some say that this is Charles Boyer's

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finest portrayal. But still, for all the picture's tragic and delicate beauty, there is something lacking. Mayerling exudes an almost unnatural alabaster and cold kind of screen beauty that moves me not. The fault, I believe, may be in the rather bald story that the director accepted as a script. There is reference, for example, to an agitator called Szep. His attempts to hasten the crack-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire are implied, never shown. I feel that had his activities been indicated in the story, had the prince taken a more active part in affairs other than those of the heart, Mayerling might have been a more dynamic picture. At present it is a series of officers' carousing and tender scenes between Boyer and Darrieux, ending in a suicide pact. Admittedly, the ending is terrifying; but terror and languidity seem to have been the only moods during the entire film.

MINOR NOTES ON A MAJOR THEME . . .

HE passing of George Melies was the occasion for complete editorial silence in the columns of the trades and a brief mention in the Citizen-News. Not that it is the function of the Citizen-News to publicize the demise of one of the first great screen directors, and surely the most imaginative technically up to the time of Walt Disney. . . . Just when the newsreels start hashing up Florida publicity shots and pictures of the man who can eat sixty apples in fifty-five minutes, along comes something novel to perk up the situation. Local newsreels is the latest screen rejuvenator. Smart exhibitors are packing 'em in with their special editions of local news items. . . . The Spectator has been arguing against giveaways, throwaways, bank nights, and other non-cinematic diversions; but it took a banquet to bring the argument out strong enough to land trade paper front pages.... I took Editor Beaton's criticism anent sound, dialogue and music a bit sourly until I saw Director Norman Foster's nicely made picture Walking Down Broadway. In such a back stage sequence that I scored in Forty Naughty Girls for being played without sound, Director Foster had background music. That did the trick.

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Hollywood 10 CENTS SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Twelfth Year

Los Angeles, California—February 19, 1938

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Vicious Attack Helps Cause

Screen Writers' Guild Made an Even More
United Body by Abuse Hurled at
It by Disgruntled Editor
of "Reporter"

Victory for the Guild Seems Assured When the Labor Relations Board Hands Down Its Decision

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... REVIEWS ...

THE ADVENTURES OF MARCO POLO
THE BARONESS AND THE BUTLER
BRINGING UP BABY

- ★ . THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER
 - ★ THE BIG BROADCAST OF 1938
- ★ THE BELOVED BRAT

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REPORTER PERFORMS AS EXPECTED . . .

THE directors of the Screen Writers' Guild have reason to be grateful to Hollywood Reporter for demonstrating to the membership of the Guild that its directors are onto their jobs. Some three weeks ago, following a meeting of the directors and about fifty representatives of the various studio writer groups, the general membership was notified that a vicious attack on the Guild could be expected to appear in the Reporter within the next two weeks, and, sure enough, it did-last week. I read only the Wilkerson heading, which intimated that to read further would make me burst out crying over the fate of the poor Screen Writers' Guild. Ever since he stole from me the idea of a Hollywood film daily and kept for himself what by a gentleman's agreement was to be our joint enterprise (see Spectator, January 22), picture producers have been fattening Wilkerson for such services as the one he performed last week when he scorned facts and painted the kind of Guild picture that would please the eyes of the producers and the Screen Playwrights, an organization which has received producer support from its inception and whose membership is but one-fifth that of the Guild. The funny thing about the producers' efforts to make the tail wag the writer-dog, is that they were financed largely by the dog's money.

How the Trick Is Worked . . .

WHEN a picture was being made, it was, and still is, the producers' custom to buy one or more advertising pages in Reporter and to urge those appearing in it or engaged otherwise in its making, to follow the studio's lead in buying space. When it came to a showdown between the producers, on one hand, and writers, directors and players on the other, the Reporter went over wholly to the producers, although the bulk of the money which had purchased its support had come from those whose interests it now opposes. As the Spectator's support never has been for sale, producers would have none of it, would not give it advertising, and writers, directors, players and technicians were induced to spend so much of their own money to buy Reporter support for their employers, they had little left over for the purpose of legitimate advertising in other publications, which, when a showdown came, might see their side of any controversy that arose between

them and the producing organizations. During the past couple of weeks I have been posting myself on the Guild-Playwrights-producer situation, and now, come hell or high water, I place the Spectator definitely on the side of the Screen Writers' Guild. The pay the Spectator will receive for its support of the Guild is the comfort it derives from being loyate its convictions. That is all.

"Dialogue by Kimble" . . .

IUST in case the Guild should feel it should express its appreciation of any support given it, I hasten to tell it its thanks are due Wilkerson, not me, if it has any such feeling towards the Spectator. One of his picture reviews completed my conversion to the Guild cause. I hapened one day to be calling on Norman Reilly Raine, well known writer, in his office at the Warner studio. Raine and I have a conspiracy afoot, one aimed at the ailing son of the widow of a writer, and my thoughts were far away from pictures when I left the office and bumped into a Reporter advertising salesman who enjoys the run of the place even though the Spectator is assured by the studio that such a thing is impossible. Apparently the salesman had been having a tough time trying to extract advertising from Guild members despite the action of the Guild in asking its members to refrain from further advertising in the local film dailies (Spectator, January 29). Lawrence Kimble was one whom the salesman tried hard to land, but without success. A few days later I read a review of a picture for which Lawrence had written the screen play, Jean Negulesco the original story. The review was headed: "Cast Better Than Work of Writers." Extracts: "The screen play by Lawrence Kimble did not seem to inspire the director"; "The dialogue was wordy and often sounded like a sermon.' these criticisms may have been justified, may have been the honest opinions of the reviewer. But in the list of credits which headed the review, screen play and dialogue were credited to Kimble. It is not the custom of any studio to add "and dialogue" when listing the screen play. Obviously the Reporter went contrary to custom in its eagerness to punish Kimble for refusing to break faith with other Guild members and buy favorable mention of his contribution to the picture. Anyway, it went out of its way to let its readers know who wrote the dia-

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logue it took a poke at. It was the finishing touch. I'm for the Screen Writers' Guild. More substantial reasons will be given in future Spectators.

Guild's Victory Seems Assured . . .

THAT there is any dissatisfaction within the Guild, any weakening on the part of its members or desertions from its ranks, is of course, very far wide of the mark. It is a well organized group of approximately five hundred screen writers whose one purpose is to serve themselves by being permitted to become of the greatest possible service to pictures—a militant group with confidence in the integrity of what it stands for and the will to strive until its objective is attained. That the Labor Relations Board will not give it the bargaining power is impossible to believe, but, even so, the worst the Guild can get is the board's decision to refer the matter to the vote of the writers. And in that case a Guild victory is certain, as in voting power it outnumbers the Playwrights by four or five to one. To the extent the victory will benefit its members, so also will it benefit producers. The Spectator throughout its years has had but one plank in its platform; the greatest good to the film industry as a whole. In line with that policy is its belief in the soundness of the Guild's cause. And quite unconsciously the Reporter is serving the same cause. The vicious attack on the Guild has made it more militant than ever, has strengthened its fighting spirit, increased its confidence in the righteousness of its cause, a confidence shared by the directors' and actors' organizations which stand shoulder to shoulder with the Writers' Guild.

Writers' Guild Expresses Itself . . .

FTER I had written all the foregoing, there quite A unexpectedly came into my hands a Guild communication to its members officially stating as facts some of the things I had expressed as opinions. I quote the Guild itself: "The vicious attacks on the Screen Writers' Guild currently appearing in the Hollywood Reporter, have been expected. But no one could have foreseen that the Reporter's reprisal for the recent resolutions of the Screen Writers' Guild and the Screen Directors' Guild would take such hysterical and transparent form. It is clearly propaganda, in retaliation for our stand on advertising, and should deceive no one. Never in the history of the Guild has the membership rallied to its support with such enthusiasm as at present. Eighty per cent of all the dues have been paid up. There isn't a studio, major or independent, that the Guild doesn't expect to carry in the coming election by a great majority—and there is only one studio where the majority of the Guild may not exceed 75 per cent. Anyone who wants corroboration of these facts need only call at the Guild office or get in touch with any member of the executive Board or the studio committee. The reaction to the articles in the Reporter on the part of all creative workers in Hollywood, only reaffirms our suspicion that the guilds can get along very well without the Reporter. The question is: Can the Reporter get along without the guilds?"

WE PAT OUR OWN BACK . . .

S THE I-Told-You-So Department has not been A functioning much of late, I thought—in view of what looks like her certain choice for the part-I would get it going again by repeating a paragraph which appeared in the Spectator of October 16 last under the heading, And Why Not Paulette?: "Some Hollywood eyebrows were lifted when the premature story broke in New York to the effect that Dave Selznick had cast Paulette Goddard for the part of Scarlet in Gone with the Wind. Inexperience, lack of acting ability, and various other weaknesses were mentioned to support the contention that it was unwise casting. I agree with none of them. Ever since her name was first mentioned as a possibility for the role I have been for it. No one can claim she does not look the part. She has been on the screen only once (Modern Times) and of that appearance I wrote (Spectator, February 15, 1936): 'She gives promise of going as far on the screen as her ambitions may lead her. She is a vibrant, intelligent, graceful and fine-looking girl." I am still of the same mind and will applaud Dave's wisdom if he gives her the part.

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WHEN EAST FIGHTS WEST . . .

ONE cannot blame the New York film papers for putting up an energetic fight to keep the head offices of the picture producing organizations rooted to the soil of Gotham. A doughty anti-removalist has been Film Daily, Jack Alicoate's brisk little news recorder. In its columns, Editor Chester B. Bahn has waged a valiant fight to keep the executive staffs from coming to Hollywood, a somewhat difficult fight to maintain as all sound arguments were against his side of the case until he played his trump card, until he trotted out an irrefutable argument that settles the whole affair and gives the film head offices an even greater hold on New York. If they came to Hollywood, Bahn argues, the business executives would be but clay in the hands of the glamorous Hollywood personalities, that the whole industry would "go Hollywood," the result of which would be most alarming. Bahn acknowledges that East vs. West quarrels are constantly in progress but he sees in them the salvation of the whole business structure.

Milk In the Coconut . . .

IJE WILL let Editor Bahn explain himself: "As a matter of fact, it is that continuing quarrel that has served to help keep this industry on a fairly even keel. Instead of being disastrous, it has been a life saver on hundreds, yes, thousands of occasions in all companies, because countless picture ideas emanating from Hollywood have been actually ruinous when viewed from the world market angle. End that quarrel by placing selling, advertising, publicity and exploitation under studio influence-an inevitable result if base is changed—and it would mean the entire business would 'go Hollywood.' That is not merely a smart phrase; it constitutes a danger of catastrophic proportions. Let us see why that is so. The important personalities in Hollywood are really personali-

ties. They are persuasive. They are, generally speaking, attractive, likable and sincere. But they travel in a very small circle, mentally as well as physically, notwithstanding which they have, by the very magnetism of their personality, out-sold the best sales managers in the business to say nothing of an occasional hard-headed, canny banker. The best safeguard against this misleading magnetism is the fact that home office executives are not daily subjected to contact with people who have too much imagination and enthusiasm. It has been proven time and again that the minute you take a personal liking to a star or director, your perspective on his (or her) box-office value is destroyed. Unconsciously or subconsciously, your judgment is substituted for that of the screen's mass audience."

Has Its Money Aspect . . .

YOU will appreciate that Bahn points out a real danger. Let me illustrate: Say the Century offices are brought here. This would bring Sid Kent into more or less personal contact with Shirley Temple, Century's biggest box-office asset. Sid, we will say, sees a good chance to extend his company's business in South America by securing a chain of theatres; he talks it over with Shirley; she is against it; she smiles at him-well, you know what Shirley can do with just a little smile. And with all the Metro offices nestling together in Culver City, where do you suppose Nick Schenck would get with a business plan Freddie Bartholomew did not approve? So you see how seriously we must take Editor Bahn's warning of the disaster which would follow removal. And there is something else—this from Bahn: "The base transfer pitfalls do not end there. Salaries in Hollywood, from the exhibitor standpoint, may be frightful, but they are not to be compared with what they would reach if the home office force were subjected to the same exciting influences which now sway the studio personnel. The idea of outbidding the other studio, regardless of cost, would become universal. So set this down: Just as China is supposed to absorb her invaders, just so would Hollywood absorb and, finally, completely blot out the business judgment of the home office." I am not sure that Bahn was wise in bringing up the money angle. Players, directors, writers out here who have to struggle along with incomes of only a few hundred thousand dollars a year, may see in the removal the possibilities Bahn points out, and get behind the movement in the hope they eventually can get into real money. In the old days a screen person could get along quite comfortably on a salary of, say a quarter-million dollars a year, but since Santa Anita opened-well, what do you say to all of us getting together and whooping it until all the offices are brought here? Seems to be a good idea.

WHY NOT ITS OWN BUSINESS? . . .

NOTHING else so graphically indicates the completeness of Hollywood's abandonment of screen pleteness of Hollywood's abandonment of screen art and its embrace of stage technique as its general acceptance as a fact that Paul Muni will receive the

Academy acting award for his performance in Zola. The Spectator nominated Muni for the award, but for his performance in Good Earth. In the Chinese epic his performance was purely cinematic; in Zola he gave a stage performance. It would be nice if Hollywood would get back into its own business.

JUST A SUGGESTION . . .

CREEN acting, in its pure form, is the expression of emotions in visual terms. When pictures were silent, not more than ten per cent of what the players said was conveyed to the audience in printed titles. The meaning of the rest of it was made plain by facial expression accompanying the reading of lines. Talkies have made voice intonation more important than facial expression; has made the microphone more important than the camera. To help pictures to re-establish themselves as a series of pictures instead of conferences, some director might try what it seems to me would be an interesting experiment—the old vaudeville turn of the man who makes a complete speech, puts lots of emotion and meaning into it, but uses as words only the letters of the alphabet. If two players rehearsed a scene until they were letter-perfect in it and then played it with the alphabet instead of words, they should develop the drama or the comedy of the scene by gestures and expression for the camera to record, thus reducing the importance of the dialogue as an element of the scene. When a player must use symbols instead of words to express his emotions, the emotions will have definite pictorial possibilities which would be retained when the scene is shot for the picture. The idea is worth trying. Anything is worth trying to put a check on the present tendency of the screen to talk itself to death.

CAN WE TAKE A BOW? . . .

THERE may be some connection. In my review of Hollywood Hotel I got somewhat rough with the Warner Theatre projectionist for turning on so much sound at the preview that the audience nearly was blasted out of its seats. A week or so later, the Warner studio sent for extra copies of the Spectator containing the review. A couple of weeks later, Goldwyn Follies was previewed at the same theatre. It was O.K. for sound—just a nice volume which made the music entertaining, not nerve-devastating uproar.

GREAT, NEGLECTED THEME . . .

EACH morning the newspapers demonstrate afresh that, of all His creations, Man is the one of whom God must be most ashamed. Throughout the world scowling faces peer over international boundaries, and murder, disguised as patriotic warfare, is being done to satisfy the lust of butchers who call themselves statesmen. Not only to victors do the spoils of war belong. In our own country today are children being reared in luxury on the profits their parents make by selling Japan war material which murders Chinese children. And we call ourselves civilized! And because the snarling incompetents, who

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sit in high places, put their lust for power above the virtue of peace, the American nation is called upon to foot a bill of one billion dollars to put a rim of floating steel around its borders and a roof of fighting planes in the skies above it. Nations have become the playthings of maniacs their unwise people blindly follow. A great theme for a great motion picture, but we have no producer with brains enough to see it or guts enough to make it.

FUNNY SORT OF BUSINESS . . .

THERE is something almost pathetic in this plaint of an Indiana exhibitor as quoted by Motion Picture Herald: "(the picture) was enjoyed by all who saw it, but they were few and far between. They would rather sit at home and listen to the stars over the radio." This from another exhibitor: "Our attendance during the past month was not up to standard. This we attribute largely to radio programs, and what the producer intends to do about this we do not know." The producer will continue to reduce the box-office value of his players by making them salesmen for coffee, cigarettes, soup, or anything else whose maker will pay the price. The film industry is unique. It is the only one in the country which creates its own competition.

CHAMPIONS MARGARET LINDSAY . . .

HARVEY HULL, who designates himself as "your weekly reader" in a letter of rebuke he writes me, thereby demonstrating that he fails to take into account the whole dozen other people who read the Spectator, comes to the rescue of Margaret Lindsay as follows: "I was disappointed with your review of Gold Is Where You Find It because you left out Margaret Lindsay, whose beauty and comedy talent contributed so much to the picture. Here is a girl who can play any kind of part, and she should get credit when she gives a good performance." I agree wholly with Harvey. I share his high regard for Margaret, whose almost every screen appearance I have commented on favorably. I suppose the briefness of her part in Gold was responsible for my overlooking her.

WILL SERVE AS HOOT-PRODUCER . . .

EXHIBITORS are protesting against the advance broadcating of songs to be featured in pictures not yet released. Months ago the Spectator made the same protest, arguing that the public tired of hearing the songs before they heard them in the picture houses. I understand Metro is to release a picture in which My Beer, Mr. Shane, or whatever its title is, will be sung. I can imagine the hoots with which audiences will greet it.

FOREIGN ONE COULD TEACH US ...

THE foreign picture, *Mayerling*, shows how unnecessary is the great amount of dialogue which Hollywood crowds into its productions. *Mayerling* talks

all the time, but only about one-tenth of what is said is translated into English and displayed on the screen in printed titles. We do not understand the nine-tenths, but we follow the story as closely as if we did. A few words convey to us the significance of a scene, and thereafter we follow it with our eyes. If the dialogue had been in English, we would have been forced to listen to all of it, even though but one-tenth would be all we need hear. If our producers were not satisfied so completely with their own conception of their fitness for the jobs they hold, they could learn a great deal from Mayerling.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

U. S. SENATOR McADOO asks California fig growers to advise Commerce Department on terms of proposed fig treaty between the United and Turkey; just something else to take my mind off my regular work, but as my young tree had seventeen figs on it last year, I suppose I had better get busy and file my recommendations. . . . The west neighbor's seven-year-old red-head trudged across the plowed field and pressed his face against the wire fence, on our side of which I was planting a row of gladiolus bulbs. "I can hardly wait till Sunday," he informed me. "Why?" I asked him. "Because I don't have to go to Sunday school," he replied. . . . Seeing a picture in Time of Janet Gaynor at the White House, I reflected that the young miss had come a long way since she lived in a small bungalow court and her chief counsellor and friend was my barber who used to tell me about her while he cut my hair; and when Janet made her hit in Seventh Heaven, the barber was so overcome with pride that I feared he would cut off one of my ears. . . . A musical memory: The Grenadier Guards' Band playing Sullivan's The Lost Chord at a Sunday morning concert in Victoria Music Hall, London. ... I am a champion forgetter of names, but a wonder at remembering telephone numbers; and this year have remembered the number of my car license

from the moment I first glimpsed it. . . . Mrs. Spectator has a way with pie crust which entitles one of her pies to be numbered among the notable creations of modern times. . . . A parade is passing the garden chair in which I am writing: Sophie, the duck, leading; Freddie, the spaniel, carrying Sophie's tail in his mouth; Alexandra, the other duck, and Bo Peep, the other dog, extremely dignified, following side by side; looks so like a wedding party I am whistling the conventional march. . . . I suppose it is inevitable that in its onward crawl, the city will engulf our quiet country road; during the hour and a half I have been writing out here, no less than five automobiles have passed. . . . My favorite luncheon is the one I get myself by picking things out of the refrigerator. . . . The parade has come about without breaking formation and is now headed for the house; I think the marchers expect me to join them; in any event, someone should bring up the rear. Excuse me.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

SELZNICK AND MR. SAWYER . . .

● THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER; Selznick-International; producer, David O. Selznick; assistant to producer, William H. Wright; director, Norman Taurog; story, Mark Twain; screen play, John V. A. Weaver; photographers, James Wong Howe, Wilfred M. Cline; special effects, Jack Cosgrove; music director, Lou Forbes; sets, Lyle Wheeler, William Cameron Menzies; film editors, Hal C. Kern, Margaret Clancey; assistant director, Eric Stacey. Cast: Tommy Kelly, Jackie Moran, Ann Gillis, May Robson, Walter Brennan, Victor Jory, David Holt, Victor Kilian, Nana Bryant, Olin Howland, Donald Meek, Charles Richman, Margaret Hamilton, Marcia Mae Jones, Mickey Rentschler, Cora Sue Collins, Phillip Hurlic.

WE NEED not worry about the children. They will go for it in a big way. It has what kids like—everything from a sore toe which is shown as a favor only to one's friends, all the way to the finding of a pirate's treasure in the deep recesses of a forbidding cave. For adults—well, it depends. First, however, Dave Selznick must be praised for his good intentions. It is to his credit that he opened a page of true American literature and brought it to us in animated visual form. It is solely his conception of the Mark Twain book he presents us with. That it may not be your conception nor mine is the hazard he had to take. Quite a clump of decades are gliding back into the past since I read the book, but I still can see my Tom Sawyer, my Huck Finn, my Aunt Polly, my Injun Joe and all the others, perhaps through eyes glazed with the forgetfulness with which slipping years dims details but leaves the characters just as much alive. My Tom Sawyer today, whatever he may have been when I closed the book, is not the boy I saw last night on the screen, not the freckle-faced, roughneck kid of a thousand sly adventures and gay flirtations; he is Dave's, not mine, and I prefer my own.

Taurog's Direction Excellent . . .

NOR is the setting in which we see Tom, his pals and people, the one my memory retains. Dave's is too ornate, too dressed up to suit my fancy. I see it in homespun; Dave dresses it in frills and furbelows; I see it in all the rural simplicity which Clarence Brown's Of Human Hearts captures; Dave puts it on a higher social scale. And you may agree with Dave, not with me. I hope you do, hope the picture meets with all the financial success such honest endeavor deserves. Given the people he has and the atmosphere which surrounds them, Norman Taurog displays brilliance in his direction, developing richly the human values, balancing nicely the humor and drama, and displaying sympathetic un-derstanding of child psychology. With what my memory tells me is strict regard for what Mark Twain wrote, the screen play strings together some of the notable scenes from the notable book, isolated fragments which it was impossible to weave into the cause-and-effect continuity screen audiences are accustomed to. It is as if we were getting illustrations from the book in place of the story, an unavoidable

treatment which makes the emotional pattern of the book a checkered one, one of squares without interlocking edges.

Color and the Box-Office . . .

TECHNICOLOR robs the picture of the smooth warmth that black-and-white photography would have given it. Never a believer in the box-office value of color treatment, convinced that at its best it does not compensate for the extra cost it entails, in Tom Sawyer I feel it cheapens many scenes which would have been beautiful in black and white. It outlines scenes too sharply to develop all the pictorial possibilities of the fine production Dave has given the picture, makes harsh many shots which could have been smooth and velvety. If we divide attention into units, we have just so many to expend on a given character. If some of the units are used up in our contemplation of the various colors in her gown, we have that many less to bestow upon her as a person, and persons, not gowns, are what carries the continuity of our interest in a motion picture. However, the distraction of color strikes only a minor note in our consideration of Tom Sawyer. Like everything else in the complete production, color is included in an honest effort to make it more entertaining. The fact that I do not like it is a matter of no importance. You may like it.

Criticizing and Reviewing . . .

WHEN I sit down to write a review of a picture I have seen, my only the seen of the seen o have seen, my only thought is to put on paper the reason I liked it or disliked it, why I was satisfied or dissatisfied with it. In all my dozen years of writing exclusively about pictures, I have not once referred to myself as a critic. Criticism, as I see it, is an intellectual pursuit. Reviewing, to me, is recording my emotional reaction to what I have seen. A good picture from my standpoint is one which altogether pleases me no matter how many flaws in it you can point out; a poor one is one which does not altogether please me, no matter how many virtues you can claim it possesses. When I left the Tom Sawyer preview last night it was with a feeling of disappointment. This morning I am analyzing my disappointment and setting down what constitutes it. I make this explanation because there is not a thing in Tom Sawyer which is not done adequately, intelligently and entertainingly. It has no bad direction, poor performances, indifferent writing; it is faithful to its origin, to the best traditions of the screen. My review, therefore, is based purely on opinion, not on fact, an opinion you quite likely will not share and which should not influence you to the extent of your denying yourself the pleasure the picture may give you.

Two Fine Little Troupers . . .

WHEN I say Tommy Kelly is not my conception of Tom Sawyer, I do not mean to imply I did not like his performance. I did—as a performance. As an actor, inexperienced, fresh from the Bronx, not from a dramatic school, the boy is somewhat of a wonder, one who restores its literal meaning to the

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expression, "a Bronx cheer." To me he merely is not the Tom Sawyer type; to the younger generation completely, and to the old generation no doubt largely, he will give satisfaction. Another splendid little trouper, a really brilliant one, is Ann Gillis, for whom I give three cheers because the character she plays, Becky Thatcher, long since has faded back among the things I have forgotten, and no prior conception colored my conception of Ann's performance. In the long cave sequence Ann and Tommy are superb. It is here the picture rises to its dramatic peak. I enjoyed every moment of it. The special effects engineered by Jack Cosgrove provide some thrilling moments. Walter Brennan presents an acting gem, and May Robson proves to be an Aunt Polly whom any boy could love. All the performances, in short, are excellent, constituting a tribute to the understanding direction given them by Norman Taurog.

ANOTHER GOLDWYN MASTERPIECE . . .

● THE ADVENTURES OF MARCO POLO; Goldwyn-U.A.; producer, Samuel Goldwyn; associate producer, George Haight; director, Archie Mayo; story, N. A. Pogson; screen play, Robert E. Sherwood; photographer, Rudolph Mate; music score, Hugo Friedhofer; music direction, Alfred Newman; art direction, Richard Day; special effects, James Basevi; film editor, Fred Allen; assistant director, Walter Mayo. Cast: Gary Cooper, Sigrid Gurie, Basil Rathbone, George Barbier, Binnie Barnes, Ernest Truex, Alan Hale, H. B. Warner, Robert Grieg, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Henry Kolker, Hale Hamilton, Lotus Liu, Stanley Fields, Harold Huber, Lang Turner.

NOTHER Samuel Goldwyn production, which A being translated in terms of his past performances, means another cinematic masterpiece has come to the screen. Sam nowadays is just about the exhibitor's best friend. Even his Dead End, after I had condemned it and termed it "Sam's Magnificent Mistake," had the effrontery to go out and clean up at box-offices. Marco Polo will do likewise. In his screen play Robert Sherwood gave Archie Mayo, director, opportunities to bring up to date the lively, joyous spirit which dominated the pictures of Fairbanks the First. Gary Cooper is a more subdued adventurer than Doug used to be, but a likable and thoroughly convincing one. All in all, Marco Polo turns out to be a brilliant quadruple play, Goldwyn to Sherwood to Mayo to Cooper, and each of them covers himself with glory. Seldom have I been impressed so strongly with the outstanding merit of a screen play. Not only does the action glide along in an easy, logical flow, but the dialogue, too, seems to have rhythmic progression. The brilliant author of Reunion In Vienna, Idiot's Delight, and other great stage successes, is equally at home in expressing himself in cinematic terms. His dialogue is terse, to the point, and his rich sense of humor almost slyly insinuates itself into the pattern at just the right spots.

Archie Mayo's Fine Direction . . .

ARCHIE MAYO gives the script its physical movement with intelligent regard for all its values. In terms of the camera and without a dozen spoken

words, Sherwood wrote the story of a hazardous journey seven centuries ago from Venice to the distant Pekin, and with dramatic force and pictorial sweep Mayo sketches it for us so graphically that the quiet passage of Cooper and Ernest Truex, his companion, through the gates of the Chinese city, assumes heroic proportions. The dominant note of the production is one of high adventure, but it has some good, old-fashioned melodrama of the sort we love to see, and a romance both as tender as a summer breeze and strong as a winter gale. But it is all grist in Mayo's mill; it flows easily and smoothly through camera and microphone in a continuous stream of superb entertainment which blends into a physical background to form a parade of striking visual treats. It is a production which brings sharply to our minds again the consciousness of what a powerful medium the screen has become, the immensity of its sweep, the delicacy of its touch in its intimate moments.

Gary and His Romantic Mate . . .

ARY COOPER proves wise casting in the role of U Marco Polo. Never reaching for an effect, never unduly stressing a point, suggesting rather than demonstrating a sense of humor, quietly persuasive in virile scenes, gentle and sincere in romantic moments, he here gives a performance so understanding, so true and sincere, that he will be accepted more as Marco Polo come back to life than an actor playing a part. Sharing the romance with him in Marco Polo is Sigrid Gurie, a young Norwegian miss whom Sam Goldwyn plucked out of a social function in London years ago and for the past year has kept tucked under his arm while he waited for just the right part for her. It will be hard for you to believe when you see the picture that she never has appeared in a picture before, never has faced a theatre audience. Reading lines without accent and in a voice like soft music. suggesting refinement, culture, good breeding; beautiful in face and form, graceful in stride and gesture, her first appearance is a triumph for her and a tribute to Sam's judgment in refusing to permit her to take dramatic lessons, to "go Hollywood" or otherwise to lessen the charm of the personality which cleared the customs with her when her ship docked at New York. Sigrid is personality plus charm plus intelligence.

All Performances Excellent ...

THE performances of the two leading players are matched in conviction by all the others of the long and important cast. Perhaps the greatest tribute to the degree of sincerity with which Basil Rathbone revealed his villainy is the complete satisfaction with which the preview audience greeted his headlong plunge into a den of hungry lions at the end of his unsuccessful effort to throw Gary in. Ernest Truex, George Barbier, Binnie Barnes—but read the list for yourself and put a good mark after each name you find on it. Also credit each technician with a duty well performed. And put Marco Polo on the list of pictures which you cannot afford to miss. It is not often we find one without even one little flaw, without too loud delivery of lines, without too obvious

acting, without something a reviewer can snap at to show what sharp teeth he has. That is the kind of picture Sam Goldwyn has given us this time. Come to think of it, it is the kind he seems to have contracted the habit of giving.

ANNABELLA'S ACCENT DISTURBING . . .

● THE BARONESS AND THE BUTLER: 20th Century-Fox; producer, Darryl F. Zanuck; associate producer, Raymond Griffith; director, Walter Lang; play, Ladislaus Bus-Fekete; screen play, Sam Hellman, Lamar Trotti, Kathryn Scola; photographer, Arthur Miller; music director, Louis Silvers; ser, Bernard Herzbrun, Hans Peters, Thomas Little: film editor, Barbara McLean. Cast: William Powell, Anabella, Helen Westley, Henry Stephenson, Joseph Schildkraut, J. Edward Bromberg, Nigel Bruce, Lynn Bari, Maurice Cass, Ivan Simpson, Alphonse Ethier, Claire DuBrey, Wilfred Lucas, Sidney Bracy, Frank Baker, Eleanor Wesselhoeft, George Davis, Margaret Irving.

TAKING advantage of the opportunity to exploit her, Century cast its French importation, Annabella, opposite William Powell, and throws this otherwise excellent picture somewhat out of tune. The story is laid in Budapest: all its characters are Hungarian, therefore it is not a picture in which there should be different accents to indicate different nationalities. But Annabella, playing the daughter of Hungarian parents, without a word to indicate she ever has been out of her native country, reads her lines in a broad French accent which at times thickens to the point of being too thick to follow. I did not understand at least one-third of what she said. If she had been playing a French girl among the Hungarians, one's failure to get a line now and then could be attributed to the sincerity of her French characterization, but when we are presented with a girl who cannot speak in an intelligible manner the language of the parents by whom she has been brought up-well, that is something else again. Century, of course, was interested in introducing Annabella in a Century-made picture, but that is no affair of the public which is asked to pay in money for the introduction.

Bill Powell, of Course, Is Good . . .

ND another thing which puzzles me is, why A Annabella? We have a score of charming girls of our own who could have fitted with precision into the pattern of The Baroness and the Butler. As a matter of fact, after I got over my surprise at the mixture of accents I derived vicarious enjoyment from the baroness role by doing my own casting, by imagining it was Madge Evans who was playing the part. The gracious, talented and cultured Madge would have been the ideal young baroness and she would have left us in no doubt of what she was saying. It was my first glimpse of Annabella, and perhaps it is unfair to judge her screen value by one appearance in a part she should not have played. I will have to wait until she appears as a French girl in an English-speaking role. As such she should be good casting. But this picture has Bill Powell in it as a highly meritorious compensating factor. Bill is at

his best, the perfect butler, the convincing statesman, the ingratiating gentleman, his performance being one of the smoothest, cleverest, most understanding in the long series responsible for his great popularity.

Story An Interesting One . . .

AN ADMIRABLE cast supports the two stars, and Walter Lang develops fully all the acting ability at his command. Especially impressive is his direction of dialogue, except in some scenes in the gallery of the house of parliament, in which characters speak in tones which would have disturbed the deliberations on the floor below. Such scenes would have been much more convincing if the lines had been whispered. Joseph Schildkraut contributes one of the excellent characterizations he has taught us to expect whenever his name appears in a cast. Century has mounted the picture handsomely, sets and setdressing being artistic and in the best of taste. Even with the handicap of the Annabella accent, the picture is among the most interesting we have had lately. The story is one of a prime minister being defeated in a parliamentary want-of-confidence vote for which his own butler is chiefly responsible. A nice, well bred romance trickles through it. In addition to defeating him in parliament, the butler also gets the prime minister's daughter, which rounds off the story in a pleasant manner.

NOTHING TO RECOMMEND IT . . .

● BIG BROADCAST OF 1938; Paramount; producer, Harlan Thompson; director, Mitchell Leisen; story, Frederick Hazlitt Brennan; adaptation, Howard Lindsay, Russel Crouse; screen play, Walter DeLeon, Francis Martin, Ken Englund; photographer, Harry Fischbeck; special effects, Gordon Jennings; songs, Ralph Rainger, Leo Robin; music director, Boris Morros; music advisor, Arthur Franklin; dance director, LeRoy Prinz; art direction, Hans Dreier, Ernste Fegte, A. E. Freudeman; cartoon sequence, Leon Schlesinger; film editors, Eda Warren, Chandler House; assistant director, Edgar Anderson. Cast: W. C. Fields, Martha Raye, Dorothy Lamour, Shirley Ross, Lynne Overman, Bob Hope, Ben Blue, Leif Erikson, Grace Bradley, Rufe Davis, Patricia Wilder, Lionel Pape, Dorothy Howe, Russell Hicks, Kirsten Flagstad, Tito Guizar, Shep Fields and his orchestra.

NEW YORK officials of the big picture producing companies acknowledge it takes brains to run the financial end of the business, but feel it takes no experience to equip one to make motion pictures. When Paramount was undergoing reorganization, Adolph Zukor decided what it needed was better product, and that as his quarter of a century in the business had taught him all about how pictures should be made, he would come out here himself and show the boys just how the wheels should go round. To the noise produced by a terrific beating of tom-toms starting in the head office publicity department and rising to the point of frenzy in the studio publicity department, President Zukor arrived, assumed charge, and since that time Paramount product has maintained an all-time low in entertainment quality. Such was the inevitable result of production being placed in the hands of one who had had no experience in modern picture-making. All I know about pictures

is what I see on the screen, and Paramount pictures give me the impression that skilled picture makers on a lot cannot make good pictures if the man from whom they take their orders does not know how they should be made.

If Bill Had Been In Charge ...

CERTAINLY that experienced producer, Bill Le-Baron, who no doubt would make a mess of running the head office, would not have made such a weak bit of entertainment as Big Broadcast of 1938 turns out to be, if he had been given a free hand in shaping its course to the screen. The many excellent productions he has to his credit make that a safe guess. A big, glittering mounting has been given the picture and there is some tuneful music in it, but on the whole it lacks that indispensible quality a picture of the sort must possess if it is to be entertaining—cleverness. There is no cleverness in Broadcast. It is just a hodge-podge of unrelated incidents, inept comedy and an undeveloped romance. The fact that the story is fantastic does not in itself contribute to the general unsatisfactory results. The screen never has given us anything more fantastic than Snow White, and no one can accuse it of being a poor picture. The Broadcast story revolves around the race of two new fangled liners across the Atlantic. It, too, is underdeveloped, being about as exciting as a block-long race between two lame mudturtles.

Comedy Without Laughter . . .

THERE are two good items on the program, a brief I solo by the brilliant soprano, Kirsten Flagstad, and a cartoon musical number written by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin. Bill Fields does a lot of meaningless clowning accompanied by a lot of talking in an irritating voice. To recover the ground this picture will lose him, he will have to have a terrific part in his next picture. Martha Raye also does a lot of clowning and screams one song. A number of others have a fling at comedy, but none of them aroused the large preview audience into indulging in even one hearty burst of laughter. The main weakness of the production is its failure to have continuous appeal, to capture audience interest and hold it by a logical parade of incidents forming a connected story. An effort to accomplish this was made by the inclusion of the transatlantic race, but it is handled so poorly that the audience will remain indifferent to its outcome. To be successful a picture must arouse a hope and in the end fulfill it. The

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. OPTOMETRIST

1725 North Highland Avenue Hollywood, California HEmpstead 8438 preview audience seemed to hope more for the end of the picture than for the end of the race.

WE PRAISE THE WRONG FILM . . .

● BRINGING UP BABY; RKO release of a Howard Hawks production; associate producer, Cliff Reid; director, Howard Hawks; screen play, Dudley Nichols, Hagar Wilde; original story, Hagar Wilde; musical director, Ray Webb; photographed by Russell Motty; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Perry Ferguson; special effects by Vernon L. Walker; gowns by Howard Greer; set dressings by Darrell Silvera; recorded by John L. Cass; editor, George Hively; assistant director, Edward Donahue. Cast: Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Charlie Ruggles, Walter Catlett, Barry Fitzgerald, May Robson, Fritz Feld, Leona Roberts, George Irving, Tala Birell, Virginia Walker, John Kelly.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

IN THE last issue of the Spectator Editor Beaton began a review of a certain picture with the admission that he had seen the film under a disadvantage, the disadvantage being an inevitable comparison between it and John Brahm's Penitentiary, which he had seen only the night before and which had impressed him so greatly. At the time I thought it a rather singular way to begin a review. But now I find myself in the same predicament. John Brahm's scenes, each possessing significant pictorial design, sharply drawn characterization, and fine dramatic sense, were shown on the screen of the Pantages Theatre but a few minutes before the preview showing of Radio's new production, Bringing Up Baby. If I had not first seen the superior workmanship I might have been more impressed by the bubbling gayety of the Radio picture and less impressed by its loose and meandering story material, its indefinite characterization, and its frequently labored humor.

There's Many a Slip...

NEVERTHELESS, the film scarcely can be said to have jelled. Considering the excellence of its cast, the production values that went into it, and the repute of its director, it has turned out to be just what it should not have been—silly. Hagar Wilde's original story of a spoiled and wealthy young madcap who takes a fancy to a preoccupied young zoologist and gets him into such inextricable difficulties that she finally becomes a part of his scheme of things, seems likely enough material; and certainly Dudley Nichols, who collaborated on the screen play, is a writer from whose pen has come some excellent material in the past. It all goes to show once more that there is many a slip between the spoon and the lip, or whatever the saying is.

Comedy Is Tacked On . . .

THE principle shortcoming of the film is that the comedy, of the recently evolved screw-ball type, instead of growing out the characterizations and out of the situations, is tacked onto the picture like so many blatant posters onto a fence. The film seems determined to be hilariously funny in spite of everything. People tumble over each other or sprawl on the ground upon the slightest provocation, or indeed upon none at all, in the manner of the old one-reel

comedies, and any quips which bear the remotest chance of being considered funny are placed into the mouths of the characters, whether they are consistent with the characters or not. Some of the horseplay is not even in good taste, especially a scene where Cary Grant, having inadvertently ripped off the back of Katharine Hepburn's gown while at a night club, runs about holding his hat over her buttocks. A sample of Miss Hepburn's humor is her approaching the table of a strange man, reaching for his olives, which she tosses into the air in an endeavor to catch them in her mouth, and exclaiming, when, as a gentleman, he begins to rise, "You can sit down. I don't mind." Katie, Katie, stop it, you're akillin' me.

Dramaturgical Principles Violated . . .

IF I seem unduely derogatory toward the picture, it is because the new whimsical type of comedy is a favorite genre of mine, one the recent development of which I view as of considerable significance. It reveals a healthy temper of our public mind and a certain philosophical growth within the motion picture industry. Such films manifest an admirable care-free, almost defiant, attitude toward the rigors of life. Eager to see the possibilities of the genre developed, I naturally rebel upon seeing violated the dramaturgical principles upon which it is based. For if many future films are given the production approach of this one, the public will soon grow tired of such pictures, since the productions will give them nothing substantial to tie their interest to in the way of characterizations and stories, nothing but empty, unrelated gags and slap-stick. The humor must flow from the inside out—from inside the characters and situations, that is—not from the outside in. Moreover, discrimination must be shown in the selection and spacing of the humorous incidents, for anything is ridiculous only as it is contrasted with some norm, and when plausibility is thrown to the four winds and the sky is the limit in buffoonery, then no speech or piece of business can be expected to realize its greatest potential response.

On the Credit Side . . .

OCCASIONALLY there is a subsidence of the injected horseplay and the film settles on a plane of plausibility, at which times some true wit can be discerned. What the spectator will probably take away from the theatre with him is the remembrance of Katharine Hepburn scampering madly through her scenes, voluminous tresses flying wildly behind her,



delightful for the sheer vivacity of her playing. It is scarcely a characterization she offers, however; no one could be required to do so many incongruous things and achieve a characterization. Cary Grant makes a good foil for her tomfoolery, and the two of them are very personable indeed. Charlie Ruggles handles his comedy deftly, and May Robson, Walter Catlett and Barry Fitzgerald are outstanding in a cast of capable troupers. Russell Motty has photographed the piece in a suitably airy manner, doing some fascinating things with Miss Hepburn's hair, and the other production values, as I have said, are good. The "baby", incidentally, is a pet leopard.

A LATE DISCOVERY . . .

● THE BELOVED BRAT; Warners release of a First National production: associate producer, Bryan Foy; director, Arthur Lubin; screen play by Lawrence Kimble, from an original by Jean Negulesco; dialogue director, Frank Beckwith; film editor, Frederick Richards; art director, Stanley Fleischer; photographed by George Barnes; sound by Francis Scheid; gowns by Howard Shoup. Cast: Bonita Granville, Dolores Costello, Donald Crisp, Donald Briggs, Natalie Moorhead, Lucille Gleason, Emmett Vogan, Loia Cheaney, Ellen Lowe, Mary Doyle, Paul Everton, Bernice Pilot, Stymie Beard, Meredith White, Carmencita Johnson, Priscilla Lyon, Gloria Fischer, Doris Breen, Patsy Mitchell.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

IT TOOK two years to rediscover Bonita Granville, I who scored such a signal hit in These Three. In her present starring vehicle, The Beloved Brat, she with telling effect exhibits her real dramatic potentialities. This young lady can act, and it is surprising that it has taken this long to find a story suited for her. It might have been her role in It's Love I'm After that retarded her progress and convinced producers she was either growing out of something or into something. The present effort re-establishes her as the screen's finest meanie, and throws a new light on her as a lovable child. But Bonita is surrounded with keen competitors. Donald Crisp, one of the heroes of Zola, gives a smooth performance that is a beautiful thing to behold. Why is not more of him seen? My own impression is that the present role demanded a much younger-looking man with a little less gravity than Donald Crisp. Dolores Costello appears for the first time since Fauntleroy and again I must ask why has she been in hiding so long? Her performance showed dramatic workmanship that deserves commendation. Comeback is it that she is making? Given the right role and they will not be able to hold her down.

Cast Excellently Selected . . .

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER BRYAN FOY has been turning out A quality B budget pictures until it is getting to be a habit. Beloved Brat is another of that long line of successes. Exceptional care was evidently exercised in the casting, and to me that constitutes a major triumph. In addition to those mentioned, Natalie Moorhead gives a fine performance as a gallivanting mother who uses her child for textbook sermons. Lucille Gleason is excellent as the matron of a private school for girls. Stymie Beard

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is swell as Pinkie White, Bonita's happy-go-lucky dark-skinned playmate. Meredith White is excellent as the breathless kid sister, and Bernice Pilot does fine as the mother of the two kids. Paul Everton gave an applause-provoking performance as the Judge of the Juvenile Court. Donald Briggs was good as the other part of the heart interest.

Story a Little Loosely Told . . .

DIRECTOR ARTHUR LUBIN moves his characters about with consummate skill. There can be no question that he got as much out of his cast as the script would allow. Unfortunately the story is not up to the dramatic potentialities of the cast. The one basic weakness was Bonita's speedy regeneration from an incorrigible brat to a child of angelic sweetness. Not that her acting was not convincing; but the lines and the situations were not carefully planned. Then, too, Bonita had not only perjured in court and sent an innocent man to jail for a long term, but had actually committed the crime herselfforcing her chauffeur to swerve the car, crash headlong with another and kill the occupant of the other vehicle. This in itself constitutes manslaughter and under the statutes of California, the state in which the story transpires, the girl would be sent to a forbidding reform school. Her sentence in the present instance was a very light one. Screen Writer Lawrence Kimble made Bonita's moral regeneration a little easy, and employed some stock pedagogical and child-psychology cliches in bringing her around.

Well Staged and Produced . . .

THE sets by Stanley Fleischer were executed in the best of taste and one got a feeling of a girl's school. A mention of Howard Shoup for colorful and imaginative costumes for the school inmates, plain and yet not drab. A word about Emmett Vogan as the butler, object of Bonita's thorough hate. He did a fine dramatic job and deserves mention. But he was miscast. He did not look like the kind of man Bonita would hate as intensely as she did. I mention this one piece of casting apart from the rest because it made me so completely uneasy throughout the picture. A little aside at this point does not seem amiss. If producers could turn out their B's in the same category with this one, then the current problem that is facing Hollywood might be solved. I have always felt in reviewing pictures of minor budget proportion, that what it takes to make a good picture is not extravagance but intelligent production, of which The Beloved Brat is an instance.

WE OFFER BETTER BARGAIN . . .

PARAMOUNT has wound up Emanuel Cohen's contract by paying him \$450,000 not to make one more picture for it. I do not think it was a wise transaction on the part of Paramount. For that much money, or perhaps even for a little less, I cheerfully would have agreed with the company not to make two pictures for it.

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

EXPERIENCE IS WHAT MATTERS . . .

CHILD-WOMAN" and "a child of indefinite age" are ways in which Judy Garland recently has been characterized by the press. Certainly there is something incongruous in the sight of a young female, as capable of comprehending and interpreting the sentiments of popular songs as any woman of thirty, scampering about in the dresses of a child and being treated by the other principals as though they might at any moment benignly proffer her a lollipop. It would seem that the cinematic powers that guide the destiny of the little one are failing to take cognizance of the fact that intelligence or personality in general are not determined by years but by experience. Judy evidently is well schooled in show business and has absorbed much of the knowledge and skill of her older feminine colleagues. That knowledge and skill are in themselves maturity, regardless of the age of the person in which they exist. When she is teamed with a child like Ronald Sinclair, her over-experience is at once thrown into relief. It is not being suggested that she be placed in ingenue roles. There is still physical growth to be completed. But a more befitting part would be one of a youngster somewhere in mid-adolescence. It occurs to me that Universal is handling Deanna Durbin well in this respect, presenting her as almost a young woman, but not quite. Her cleverness impresses us as being exceptional but plausible.

Genius Made a Difference . . .

SPEAKING of precocity always reminds me of a tale about Mozart. An eager fellow of ten summers one day called on the great composer to seek his advice on certain problems incurred in the composition of his own pièce de résistance, a symphony. After scanning the boy's manuscript, the composer delicately suggested that it might be wise for him to sharpen his skill for a while with less difficult undertakings, some songs or sonatas, in as much as symphonies were mighty projects, even for adults. "But," protested the young musician, "you composed symphonies when you were ten years old." "Ah," replied Mozart, "but I never asked how."

LONG MAY HE ROAR . . .

HAVE you ever noticed how the producers' concept of the importance of sound on the screen is symbolized by the trade-mark sequences which come at the very opening of films? Most of such flashes are accompanied by actual noises—either the clanking of chains or the buzz-buzz of a radio apparatus or something of the sort. Some feature fanfares, but these are little short of noise. Of all the sundry noises I believe Leo's roar is the least enervating.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

Two Vital Voices . . .

MUSICALLY The Big Broadcast of 1938 is without significance, and at times the reverse, except for the appearance of two singers. To bring Kirsten Flagstad, foremost Wagnerian soprano, and Tito Guizar, superlative Argentinian tenor, to the screen is to make film history. But for the remainder of the picture, Paramount cannot make any claims. There is a pretty tune, the music by Ralph Rainger, words by Leo Robin, You Took the Words Out of My Heart. It would be a relief to hear Dorothy Lamour sing otherwise than in that weepy, drooling manner when she balances herself on the edge of intonation. The Memory song of Shirley Ross and Bob Hope would have more appeal if it were shorter. Pity the poor lyricist. He must have completely run out of rhymes, so he matched "sitting on the floor" with something about Singapore. (Thanks be to the British!) The ballet episodes, based on some old formula of the evolution of the dance, is musically disappointing. What could not have been done if they had used Ravel's La Valse! But one should not ask too much from Boris Morros after putting the Battle Cry from the Valkyrie on the screen.

Magnificent Sound . . .

THIS Kirsten Flagstad engagement is on a par with last year's musical highspot in the Big Broadcast of that vintage. There is no need for praising the peerless prima donna of the Metropolitan Opera. It is a stirring experience to see her in action and hear her sing this heroic melody, under less remote circumstances than in the opera. The eye does not have the impression of the one dimension of the screen, although the scene is without action beyond the swinging of a spear. The personality of this unsurpassed singer is visualized, and more, it is vivified, by projection of picture and of sound. I think the recording, made in the East by members of the Philharmonic Orchestra of New York, Wilfred Pelletier conducting, is singular in power and beauty of tone. It is all the more amusing to contemplate the nonchalant manner in which the announcer (on the screen) introduces this magnificent opera excerpt.

Guizar a Great Tenor . . .

TOO little, to my thinking, has been made of Tito Guizar, the Latin-American tenor, who, like Flagstad, possesses one of the most vital voices I have heard. His is also one of the most vividly beautiful, technically best produced tenor voices off, as well as on, the screen. Guizar sings a short English and also a Spanish ballad. The very manner of his pronouncing the words is fascinating. There is tonal resilience and resonance in his pianissimo as in his full-throated singing. He sings inescapably, although what he sings is light. But he makes it eminently lovely, eminently meaningful. Guizar appeals to me because he turns every word, every syllable into a phonetic jewel

without being unnatural. The recording is most excellent, including the guitar accompaniments.

Return of Maxim . . .

SEVERAL years ago, Amkino showed a Soviet propaganda film, The Road of Youth. Dmitri Shostakovitch, one of the most gifted among Russia's younger composers, provided an excellent score. The film story ends with a clash of opposing political forces. Some of the young leaders are killed, but their cause is triumphant. Comrades return on a wreathed flat-car to the city and as the train with the slain leaders rolls in, the factory whistles blow a poignant salute of mourning, as if the very machinery groaned its sorrow over the human losses. Shostakovitch again was called upon to compose for a not dissimilar film, The Return of Maxim. shown recently at the Grand International Theater. On various occasions, during scenes of dire industrial strife, Shostakovitch again builds these strange, hardly discernible chords, in which notes are packed so closely that the effect is more that of mechanical sound than of music made according to all the rules of what the Soviet used to call bourgeois art. They have taken that art again to their music hungry bosoms, but Shostakovitch continues to work in what one might call extra musical effects. I have the impression that he employs quarter-tones instead of the much more defined half-tones of conventional music. He packs these quarter-tones closely and then obtains those sound clusters which can possess elementary power and form a sound of trenchant expression.

Simple and Laconic . . .

ALTOGETHER it is a simple, almost laconic A score which Shostakovitch has put together to illustrate the struggle of the Russian workers. Whatever romance there is in the screen play is ignored by him. The love, the separation and momentary reunion of two proscribed agitators is like a sunstarved cellar-flower. Shostakovitch leaves it tuneless. It is a stark picture, though perhaps not one of the best. Music comes in like a bit of sunshine from a bleak, cloud-massed sky. A band marches by in cold light. A Russian youth hums, he plays an okarina. All sounds futile, and so it should. At a fitting moment, the Russian composer throws in laconic chords of factory sirens. They are dull and resigned gestures of economic serfdom; again they utter urgent calls to the workers to bestir themselves. In some scenes nothing but an accordion, or a single guitar provides the atmosphere. The mysterious or-chestra accompaniment which Hollywood composers conjure at the most implausible moments, never makes its ridiculous intrusion. Then there is the factory music of wheels, again a few bars of full orchestra telling of all the despair, terror and determination of unarmed workers fighting the soldiers of the Tsar. One hears again the fateful salute of the

factory whistles for their dead ministrants. Very clever is the use of a moment of silence, following the discovery of a dangerous secret; then comes pretense of nonchalance with the tinkle of a guitar and a typical Slavic folk song. All very simple and very true.

Lesson from Porgy . . .

Screen interested person sees a lively music play, he or she wants Hollywood to put it in celluloid. This proves two things: that people are demanding more genuinely dramatic music plays for the screen, also that they overlook two important factors. One is that the difference between stage and screen drama is filmic action. Moreover the music textual treatment in opera cannot be pushed bag and baggage onto the screen. The idea of making Gershwin's Porgy and Bess is not new and fortunately it has remained an idea. More alterations would be necessary than can be told in this brief note. And if Du Bose Heyward were induced to revamp his negro folk classic, what of the Gershwin score written for the shortened Heyward play?

Orchestrations and the Screen . . .

ORCHESTRATION for the opera pit, furthermore, is not always the best for the screen. On the other hand Porgy and Bess employs a form of rhythmic dialogue neither spoken nor actually sung. It is a deviation of the Wagnerian Sprech Gesang or Song Speech. It is a dramatic and by no means unnatural form of expression, especially for the negro. Gershwin has indicated in the score pitch and rhythm for this kind of declamation. Altogether Porgy and Bess moves tonally in the folk idiom of the negro. Entirely Gershwin's invention, the music is folk-like, and that element, too, is one the music screen could adopt to advantage. At present, the music screen is crowded with banal and hackneyed lyrics. Hollywood fears the folks would not understand, but all of America does not live in Tin Pan Alley.

Newsy and Noisy . . .

ONE does not expect to hear a Mozart Andante or Skyrabin tone-poem during the newsreels, but it seems as if newsreel music directors had advanced little beyond the nickelodeon days when the hardworked pianist had his stock repertoire which, absurd enough in some details, seemed inviolate whether the theatre was in Prairie Flats or in Philadelphia. I realize that newsreels are put together in a hurry, but I wonder if the newsreel editors have any idea how fast musicians can work. Noisy, utterly meaningless blaring and thumping preface and accompany much of what is shown. Agreeable improvements are made occasionally by the producers of The March of Time. How much more appropriate it would be to hear a succession of bells, ticking of the telegraph, of a telephone bell, the whirring of sound trucks, railroad or airplane engines, every one an agent-indicator of time and action. Then the news

would unfold, if possible, not accompanied by raucous sound called music.

How Russians Do It ...

A T THE Grand International Theatre I saw a Russian news film of a public celebration of the anniversary of the revolution. Tens of thousands marched past Stalin, smiling and waving. The accompanying sound was that of the chorus from the ninth symphony of Beethoven in which this composer proclaims the brotherhood and self-delivery of man. I do not know whether the marching masses actually sang it or whether the Russian news-music editor added the strains which go with "Happy as a victor he rushes forward." There were also buglers. To my amazement they blew a historic old fanfare, a favorite of German regimental bands. It is known as the fanfare of the Margraves of Brandenburg, who were the epitome of feudalism and, of course, the forerunners of the Kaiser. Here was musical irony in a Soviet film.

Poor Igor Sues . . .

WARNER BROS. paid rather handsomely for the right of using bits from Igor Stravinsky's Firebird ballet music during the score for a film play of the same title. Now the Russian composer, after pocketing the money, complained in a French court to the tune of 300,000 francs against the makers of the picture, asserting that they had not only appropriated the title of his ballet, but that the action was based on the doings of crooks, and worst of all, the villain of the piece was allowed to mislead the heroine to the strains of the Firebird music. Stravinsky objected also to a Viennese waltz being tied to his music. The French court viewed the film and awarded him damages to the tune of three cents. I wonder what Verdi would say, if he could hear the parodies of his music in MGM's Everybody Sing. This amusing musical contains also a take-off on Leoncavallo's Pagliacci prologue. Beethoven's Sonata Pathetique has long been favorite material for background music when stealthy yeggs tiptoe about preparing to crack a safe. I have seen screen cossacks galloping up a staircase to the accelerated strains of Kamenoi Ostro. It will be interesting to hear what the Viennese Erich Wolfgang Korngold adds to Warner Bros.' Robin Hood. Any one who has heard his delightful Much Ado About Nothing incidental music will expect much. Korngold has written a number of scores for Shakespeare plays, and not only is familiar with English music of that time, but has a flair for writing music in the spirit of "merrie olde England."

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SPECTATOR READERS WRITE

HUGH IS QUITE INFURIATED

D^{EAR} Welford: In sending you the play Of Mice and Men I realize now that I have been casting pearls before swine. Your first editorial on this subject merely annoyed me. Your second, after reading the play, really infuriates me.

I have frequently referred to you in the course of our controversies as a literate, intelligent man. If you cannot recognize the fine, stirring qualities in this play after reading it, then I will have to revise my estimate. To quote an isolated speech from the play, as you have done, is stupid, unfair and, in fact, quite childish. Unquestionably the play abounds in profanity. Mr. Steinbeck, being an honest dramatist and a good reporter, puts into the mouths of his characters the words they would be most likely to use. Are you such a bigot that an occasional word of profanity or even obscenity will blind you to a basically fine play? Or do you sincerely believe that the honest friendship between two men is a disgusting theme?

In much that you have had to say editorially on the subject of smut and vulgarity all right thinking people have agreed with you. In this instance, however, I feel sure that your sophomoric criticism will alienate the sympathies of all those of your readers who, like myself, found Of Mice and Men to be a

fine and honest drama.

Furthermore, entering your own field of prediction, I venture a prophesy. I will, in fact, bet you a new hat that:

a. When Of Mice and Men reaches the screen it will not have been changed thematically.

b. The deletion of the quite incidental profanity will in no sense weaken the play.

c. The Breen office will offer no objection. d. It will make money at the box-office.

I may lose a hat on that last clause. The public is accustomed to pap and, in cross section, may be just as indifferent to honest dramaturgy as the editor of the Spectator.

F. HUGH HERBERT.

HE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW

TO THE EDITOR:

A meeting was held last Sunday at the Paramount Studio Auditorium, at which was screened for a committee of cameramen and judges, what was considered the ten best feature-length pictures produced in Hollywood during the year 1937. Of these ten pictures, three were chosen as outstanding in their photographic value, namely:

The Good Earth—photographed by Karl Freund Wings Over Honolulu—photographed by Joseph

Valentine

Dead End—photographed by Gregg Toland.

I would have no question in regard to The Good Earth, but in considering Wings Over Honolulu it strikes me as being peculiar that this picture, with its multitude of transparencies and background-process shots, was selected as being one of the three best for the year. Likewise, in considering Dead End which was photographed almost entirely on one stage, with no difficulties in lighting, photography or other setups, the judgment is, in my opinion, very much open to criticism.

Permit me to draw your attention to Columbia's Lost Horizon, photographed by Joseph Walker, which was considered at this meeting. This production was photographed under the utmost rigid conditions. The difficult locations, such as Victorville, Sherwood Forest, the Ice-house in downtown Los Angeles, and at their Columbia Ranch, were used during rain and other adverse weather conditions. Even so, each shot matched perfectly with its companion shots and the picture in its entirety was a masterful example of photographic perfection.

Perhaps there are phases of this judgment that I do not know of, but as a picture fan, an amateur cinematographer and a lover of beautiful photography, I wish someone would explain to me, and hundreds of others who share my opinion, I'm sure, just why the decisions above mentioned were made in this order, and Lost Horizon was not even in the

running.

AN AMATEUR CINEMATOGRAPHER.

OF MICE AND MEN AND ME

MY DEAR Mr. Beaton:
There are so many things in your magazine that I find valuable and interesting that I often pass over what I disagree with, but you have given such a false impression of a good book that this time I cannot remain silent. I have already been in hot discussions about Of Mice and Men, so I realize that you are not my only opponent on the subject.

First, I must say that there is one respect in which I thoroughly agree with you. It is not suitable material for the screen. To quote Alfred Hitchcock in his article on direction in Footnotes to the Film: "The films suffer from their own power of appealing to millions. They could be subtler than they are, but their popularity won't let them." But I must also say that I did not consider Dead End suitable material for the screen until I saw what Samuel Goldwyn did with it, and Dead End has offered my classes some very profitable discussion.

Now for my defense of the story and the play the theme is universal and powerful in that it expresses what is often overlooked, the intense longing of human beings for a home. To make it more striking Steinbeck uses roving workers, low class men, one of them lower than a moron, a "drooling

half-wit," as you call him. Some of my opponents ask how a great work of art can be occupied with the behavior of subnormal Lennie. I reply that it is justified when we consider the symbolism of the conflict between the two friends: that George, who represents in a general way human intelligence, is thwarted in his plans for their common happiness by the uncontrolled behavior of Lennie, the embodiment of the baser human instincts, which in the intelligent are generally either suppressed into the subconscious or sublimated. Many lives on higher levels are wrecked by a similar result of a similar conflict within themselves. It seems to me that this aspect also is universal.

The story really paints some very appealing pictures—two poor ignorant fellows with a dream of happiness—a dream they share with high-powered executives and white collar workers—a dream of a place of their own in the country. There is certainly nothing wicked about that! Also there is the touching grief of the man whose dog was killed. You especially should sympathize with him. And besides there is the skilful and admirable foreman

sketched into the background. The tale is not all base by any means.

The question of how far literary art should go in its search for truth is perhaps still unanswered, but it would be impossible to present that very poignant and moving narrative without the speech used by men of that type. Your remark about the dead mouse as one of the leading characters violates one of your own frequently expressed principles of criticiss—in your effort to secure humor you have ignored suitability and truth! Is that your opinion after having actually seen the play or read the book?

Although I have not seen the New York production, I found last summer that the larger significances of the idea were clarified and enhanced by the treatment the play received when it was produced by the Theatre Union in the Green Street Theatre in San Francisco. Perhaps—but only a very remote perhaps—the same thing could be done for the screen.

FANNY L. BARBER, Washington High School, Portland, Oregon.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD

of

MABEL KEEFER

CRITICS all over the land are lauding Snow White, and the fact is tremendously interesting and a bit amusing. All signs point to box-office success, and yet, how can that be? I have not seen the picture, but as I recall the story, it seems to lack most of the ingredients that have heretofore been deemed necessary to a good box-office picture. Can it be, after all, that people are more interested in "much-needed encouragement for the battered human spirit," as Richard Watts, Jr., of the New York Herald Tribune puts it, than over-doses of night clubs, cocktail parties, mixed up husbands and wives, and all the other impedimenta that has been cluttering up the screen?

SOMEONE has said that silence is one of the great arts of conversation, and that there is not only an art, but an eloquence in it. More and more, screen actors are proving the truth of this statement, and while, without question, certain actors have, to an unusual degree, the ability to make their silence eloquent, some of the credit must go to intelligent directing.

SIMPLICITY is an exact medium between too little and too much, so it has been said. That would seem to imply the well-known "happy medium," and it is suddenly quite clear to me, why the term "happy" medium. An exact medium between too little and too much is, naturally, just right, and

what could be happier than just right? Now, if the film industry would just keep that word "simplicity" in mind.

WHAT bearing does Bank Nite and its various offspring have on box-office figures in the matter of judging the popularity of certain pictures? That note has been on my scratch pad too long and I must do something about it, even if I do lack ambition and feel inclined to defer the deliberation, this being one of the days when I have to keep reminding myself that one does not climb stairs; one mounts them. . . . To get back to the matter under discussion: There are any number of people who cannot afford to go to a motion picture theatre more than once a week. The question is, what per cent of these people does Bank Nite, or its equivalent, with an inferior picture, take away from better screen offerings that the theatre patron would much prefer to see if it were just a matter of choosing the picture? The inferior picture may show big box-office receipts, with a corresponding low for the better picture, but that does not mean a thing as far as the relative popularity of the two pictures is concerned. So, while figures may not lie, neither do they explain.

SO MANY pictures without a "love-interest" having proved to be good box-office, I hope there is no danger that producers will all rush to that side of the boat and swamp it. The thing to do is keep an even keel, with perhaps a slight list toward "loveinterest." And I had better drop these nautical terms before I find myself floundering in deep water.

IFI had a good hickory log I'd have a fire in the fireplace tonight if I had a fireplace.

LET LIFE



BE LOVELY



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This Year's Race for Top Box-Office Honors

Ussher Discusses Music In Beethoven Film

Mabel Keefer Pleads For Great Spiritual Picture

Eastern Newspaperman's Opinion Of Film Publicists



PORT OF SEVEN SEAS * RECKLESS LIVING * GOODBYE BROADWAY
BATTLE OF BROADWAY * PENROD'S DOUBLE TROUBLE * ROSE OF THE RIO GRANDE
IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM

Page Two



FOUR GIRLS AND FILM FAME . . .

THIS year's race for top box-office honors will be I an interesting one. Basing my guess on conditions as they are at present, I would pick Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin, Sonja Henie and Jane Withers to be, not necessarily in that order, among the first half dozen in popularity. It depends upon their producers, but if each of the four is presented with ordinary intelligence during the remainder of the year, she will be among the screen's all-time high box-office winners. In any event, each is now high enough in boxoffice rating to make it worth our while to look for the reason. None of them has been on the stage, has had stage training or experience in playing to an audience. This means she has not played for applause, has not given thought to tricks to get it, has learned only to express herself in terms of the characters she has played. Shirley and Jane are screen institutions, screen veterans, one might term them, and have won their box-office rating solely by the force of their personalities. Deanna and Sonja came to the screen in each case with personality plus a fully developed accomplishment. But Deanna has not sung her way into the hearts of the world, nor has Sonja got as far as she has by virtue of her amazing grace as she glides over a sheet of ice. The accomplishments merely brought them more immediately to the attention of the public, thus permitting the charm of their personalities to register more promptly.

Personality Their Chief Asset . . .

FTER Deanna first sang to a Hollywood audience A gathered on a Universal stage, I wrote that her personality would carry her far in pictures; and in my review of Sonja's first screen venture I rated her personality as her chief asset. As the four girls have earned places among the world's greatest entertainers by virtue of something born in them and not solely by virtue of something they had to learn, it would seem to be the better part of wisdom for motion picture producers to cease their constant search for acting talent and to concentrate on the search for personalities. And when a personality is discovered, the wise producer will not endeavor to make an actor or actress of the person possessing it. Shirley and Jane have got where they are because their personalities had carried them quite a long way up the ladder of success before it occurred to anyone to make an actress out of either of them. Deanna's voice and Sonja's skating saved them from the tragedy of being trained to register their personalities by the rules of acting. Each of them was presented to the public for what she could do, and gained the instant acclaim of the public for what she is—a charming girl with an inborn ability to express her charm.

We Love One, Admire the Other . . .

LL the equipment a screen player need have is A imagination enough to make him or her the character played. The camera can give all the rest of the performance. As we look down the list of film boxoffice standings we do not find high up on it the name of any player who would be rated great if judged by the standard of the stage to which Hollywood always is looking for new talent. The screen is not an acting art; it is an art expressed by adaptable personalities. We love screen players because we move with them through all the experiences they have in a picture, always are at their side, close enough to them to catch their most fleeting look, their slightest gesture. They project nothing to us; the camera, which always is the audience, takes us to them. It is exactly the reverse with stage players. We admire them for their mastery of their art, but do not love them as we do screen players. Theirs is an art of projection. The proscenium arch is the boundary between their world and ours. The screen belongs to personalities, the stage to actors. The Shirley Temples and Deanna Durbins always will lead the screen parade.

RATHER UNPLEASANT AFFAIR . . .

ORDINARILY when I visit a motion picture set I am received with courtesy, and even those who may disagree with views I have expressed do not take issue with me when I am the guest of the producer making the picture or the director shooting it. Recently, however, I was subjected to treatment of a different nature when I visited my friend, John Stahl, on his set at Universal studio. An actor, a young upstart, whom I have seen on the screen but once, took violent issue with views I had expressed in my review of the picture in which he had appeared. I grant anyone the right to challenge my views,

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No Cuto

but I feel I am entitled to some degree of courtesy from one whose opinion differs from mine. But even that, our differing opinions or the lack of courtesy, was not what roused my ire. The young man challenged my honesty, accused me of having been bribed to give credit, rightfully his, to another member of the cast. He even went so far as to say that he and a friend of his—the name of the friend, if I recall it correctly, was Skinny Doogan-saw Edgar Bergen pay me money and heard me agree to give Bergen all the credit in my review of Goldwyn Follies. In spite of the efforts of Mr. Stahl and Mr. Bergen to suppress him, the young bounder continued with his vituperation until I no longer could restrain myself, and I regret that I so forgot myself as to tell him he was a dirty little liar when he asserted I had accepted money from Mr. Bergen to write my review as I had written it. The name of the offensive little squirt, someone on the set told me, is Charlie McCarthy.

JEFF TURLOCK COMES TO TOWN...

JEFF TURLOCK, an old newspaper crony of mine, came to town and looked me up. Never had been in Hollywood before, although he has written quite a lot about pictures and picture people. I told him I would do anything I could for him except to drag him around and introduced him to stars, something, I informed him, I never did for anyone. That was all right with him. The only man he wanted to meet was Howard Benedict, and the only actress, Madge Evans, so if I could tote him to the RKO studio. where Benedict is head of the publicity department, he would nose around for himself and find Madge, who for years and years had been his and his family's number one screen sweetheart. I hedged a bit by telling him I knew Clark Gable pretty well, also Gary Cooper, Joel McCrea, Warner Baxter and a whole raft of others, but he stuck to it that the only man he wanted to meet was Howard. I asked him why. Seems one time he wrote the RKO publicity department for a 2000-word biography of Walter Connolly; got it pronto, just as he wanted it, together with a note from Howard to the effect that he was glad to comply with the request even though Connolly was a Columbia studio contract player and was not appearing in RKO pictures.

Jeff's Estimate of Howard...

ANY fellow, Jeff explained, who will write up another studio's actor because a newspaperman asks him to, is the live kind of publicity purveyor worth having a talk with. "Of course," Jeff went on, "I knew he did it to get my friendship so he could unload his own publicity on me thereafter. If that were not his idea he would have sent my letter to the Columbia people and let them answer it. But he wanted to hook me, and he did. Ever since then I've played his game—given RKO about as much publicity as I've given all the rest combined. Oh, Benedict's got a head on him all right. He prepares his stuff for the newspaper fellows, not for his studio. He even goes

so far as to include in his stuff mention of other studios' people and pictures. Yes, sir, I have given MGM, Warners and the others bits of publicity I had found in a RKO envelope, sprinkled in, of course, among a lot of his own stuff. Got so that lately I've been opening only the RKO envelope and punctuating Howard's publicity with bits of the news of other studios which come with it; make up my weekly letter that way for all the papers I serve. So, brother, I want to meet Howard Benedict. And I forgot to mention another thing I want to do. I want to eat at a Brown Derby restaurant. That's one of the things I came out here for-that, Madge Evans and Benedict." I took Jeff to meet Howard, and next day to lunch at the Hollywood Brown Derby, where I had a third guest-Madge Evans. Jeff was tickled pink. "I must telegraph mother and the girls," he said when Bill Chelios, the peerless head waiter, had bowed and smiled us out to the sidewalk.

BUDDY EBSEN HAS EVERYTHING . . .

EVER since he made his first appearance on the screen, the conviction has been strong within me that Buddy Ebsen has everything necessary to a long and successful starring career. I do not rate his dancing ability as one of the attributes entitling him to consideration. In The Girl of the Golden West he plays a prominent part and does no dancing. He is impressive, sincere, deeply human, registering strongly without any striving for effect. His handsomely homely appearance, his every look and gesture reflecting a strong and fascinating personality, everything he does suggesting feeling and intelligence, are ingredients of which stars are made. He is the type, too, which can go on indefinitely, the type to which age means nothing and passing years serve only to strengthen. The only thing hindering Ebsen's career now is the fact of his being on a studio payroll. If he lived in some distant country, Metro would bring him here and make a star of him.

WHEN ENGLAND DISCOVERED PLANES ...

WHEN I read of the tremendous sums of money being spent by England in building a fleet of airplanes, my memory goes back to a raw November day in 1911 when Britain's air consciousness was born. Today it is dramatic; then it was a bit of official routine. On my Atlantic crossing I made the acquaintance of a young aviator, a fellow passenger who had gained fame in this country by his daring flying, circling the Statue of Liberty being one of his notable exploits. His name, T. O. M. Sopwith, since the unsuccessful contender for America's cup. Our friendship continued after our arrival in London and we saw one another almost daily. Tommy wanted to go into the business of manufacturing planes, and he kept me posted on his efforts to interest the government in flying as a factor in national defense. One day he burst into my hotel room, greatly excited and demanding a drink. He had put it

over, he enthusiastically announced. The British Government had awakened! His sister May, he told me, would call for me next morning and drive me out to Brooklands, and then he took another drink and fled, still excited. Shortly after our arrival at Brooklands, then, I believe, London's only airport, Winston Spencer Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty and Colonel Seeley, representing the War Department, arrived. Tommy, again the cool, collected aviator, sent up some planes while the group of not more than a dozen people stood on the ground and tried to keep warm. When the flights were over, we had sandwiches and tea in a hangar. Both Churchill and Seeley told me it looked as if flying might become an important feature of naval and military activity. No mention of the incident appeared in a London paper. In retrospect there was drama in it, the first act of what has become a tremendous drama, but when it began it was just a darned cold experience.

THEY WILL BEAR WATCHING ...

TWO people I have my eye on; Winnie Sheehan and John E. Otterson. Each of them is going to be heard from in a big way, but just what way I do not know. Men like them can not be kept down. There must be burning in Winnie a desire to show the Century crowd he still knows a thing or two about producing pictures, and while I have not seen him since Mary Pickford's wedding reception and know nothing whatever about his plans, I am prepared to hear any day that he is launching an ambitious production program. And John Otterson is not going to let the Paramount crowd get away with its treatment of him. That, of course, is just my guess. He is too big a man to take it lying down, and Paramount certainly treated him shamefully, summarily ousting him just as he was organizing the company on a sound basis. I look for him to become a big figure in pictures. Come to think of it, there is another I have my eye on. Harold Franklin has been still about long enough. His scooting around the country must mean something. He is the sort of man who does big things in a big way, and fellows like that do not stay buried.

PURELY PERSONAL PARAGRAPH . .

WITH regret I have to announce that I am at outs with my namesake, Welford Hill, a young man who not so very long ago became a member of the family of Howard Hill, my associate in Spectator affairs. Metro was looking for an actor to play Clark Gable as a baby. I was unaware that Welford had embarked upon a professional career, but, anyway, he received a call and was among the gurgling, quiet, sleeping, and rambuncious candidates for screen fame by basking in the reflected light of the great Gable. Welford caught the eye of the casting director. "He's just what I want," his mother was told. "Let me see him walk." The strained relations

now existing between Welford and me are due to the fact that he positively refused to walk.

HOME MARKET BIG ENOUGH . . .

MORE news in film papers about the further tightening of foreign markets for American pictures and further reduction in receipts from abroad. The situation is becoming serious, the papers state. If Hollywood made its pictures sensibly and kept its mind on the domestic market, it could make all the money it needed and tell the rest of the world to go to blazes. One hundred and thirty million potential customers at home are enough to make any business prosperous.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

N THE low table beside my bed is the assorted reading matter I dip into in search of reading to get motion pictures out of my mind and give me something else to think about before going to sleep. At the moment the assortment consists of Stage, New Yorker, Readers' Digest, Theatre Arts Monthly, Life, Script, and Frances Marion's most excellent 400-page How To Write and Sell Film Stories.... This morning I walked over smooth, hard-packed sand between high banks the recent flood had carved; before the flood the spaniel and I used to pass the same spot and wish good-morning to the young woman who generally was working in the flower garden surrounding an attractive bungalow which stood, as nearly as I could work it out this morning, about in what is now the exact center of the wide expanse of smooth, hard-packed sand. . . . Just read of another film comedy which "made them roll in the aisles." Never was present when they rolled, but would like to see what would happen if Darryl Zanuck and Man Mountain Dean rolled in the same aisle at the same time. . . . Milkman says one-quarter of bottles put out for him are unwashed. . . . When the spaniel tries to crowd into the pekinese's bed there is the deuce to pay. . . Ed Durling asks in the Times if a poached egg on the top of a plate of good corned beef hash, spoils it. It does. Any other questions?... On a wall of my library is hanging a framed maple leaf, flaming with the color of Autumn, which a few years ago I took from a tree in the Canadian town in which I was born; brought it home pressed between the covers of Gone With the Wind. . . . Mrs. Spectator is knitting for me some gorgeous socks with bands of various colors encircling them.... Spring in our garden of perpetual bloom; soon the Winter flowers will go off shift, their places taken by those which will adorn the green things now sturdily pushing themselves upward, encouraged by the sun to make the garden a perfumed paradise of many colors. . . . With various wars, Garbo's marriage plans and loud dialogue already on hand to worry about, along comes a scientist to add to our uneasiness by telling us that in only thirty million years the sun is going to explode.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

GETS UNDERWAY SLOWLY ...

 PORT OF SEVEN SEAS; Metro release of a James Whale production; produced by Henry Henigson; stars Wallace Beery; directed by James Whale; features Frank Morgan, Maureen O'Sullivan, John Beal and Jessie Ralph; screen play by Preston Sturges; from play "Fanny," by Marcel Pagnol; musical score by Franz Waxman; sound by Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Gabriel Scognamillo and Edwin B. Willis; photographed by Karl Freund; montage effects by Slavko Vorkapich; film editor, Frederick Y. Smith. Supporting cast: Cora Witherspoon, Etienne Girardot and E. Allyn Warren.

DECENTLY in the Spectator (March 19) I asked R why producers thought it necessary to make all feature pictures of practically the same length, quite irrespective of the amount of footage necessary to the proper telling of a given story; if the story had only four reels of essential action in it, why thin it out to fill seven reels of film? The thinning-out process, I argued, could result only in lessening the box-office value of the picture. As is the case with all opinions I express, I was shooting in the dark, but—as is the case with most of them—this one was proven sound with more than usual promptness. Generally it takes the film industry three or four years to catch up with the Spectator, but, in this case, Metro was making a picture to prove a theory even before the theory appeared in print. Port of Seven Seas has enough story to provide, at the most, forty minutes of running time. For purely mechanical reasons it is stretched into seventy-eight minutes of running time. All the superfluous footage is stuck onto the front end of the film and consists entirely of dialogue, of a stream of chatter in which we grope for one idea which seems to bear some relation to another. In my dozen years of picture reviewing I have not walked out on a half a dozen pictures, but was on the point of walking out on this one, when suddenly it began to take form.

Finally Becomes Impressive . . .

WHEN Port of Seven Seas settles down to being about something, it sticks to the something and becomes the finest piece of screen entertainment ever to emerge from a fog. All that part of it which comes out of the fog is story—all the story there is in the picture; all that preceded it is done excellently except for the too abundant dialogue. Direction is masterly, the production is of that rare quality which characterizes all the creations of the brilliant Cedric Gibbons and his talented associates, and performances offer no ground for adverse criticism, but up to the point of the beginning of the story, the whole thing drags interminably. Metro may argue that the opening reels establish the characters and the atmosphere of the story. Such an argument would be reasonable if applied to a novel through which we could wander at a leisurely pace to match our inclinations and the entertaining quality of the writing as such; but in the case of screen entertainment, characterizations should be established by the story itself, should be parts of the forward movement, every incident being the

logical outcome of what precedes it and all of them combining to give the story uninterrupted impetus. Here, for instance, we have a card game which establishes two characters whom we do not see again after the story begins, and, in the case of the other two players, introduces nothing which has any relation to what happens after we find out what the story is about. But whatever defense can be offered to support the opening sequences, the fact remains that they are tiresome, and there should be nothing tiring in a screen offering.

Story Is About Something . . .

WHEN the story gets underway it proves to be one of substance and vigor, a daring sort of story, as screen stories go. Maureen O'Sullivan plays the part of an unwed girl about to become a mother; her lover (John Beal) has departed for a three-year cruise on a sailing vessel, and she yields to the importunities of a much older man (Frank Morgan) who wishes to marry her. She tells Morgan of her condition, but it makes him still more eager for the marriage as it assures him of the realization of his life-long desire to have a child, preferably a son, to perpetuate his name and inherit his fortune. Delicately, feelingly the story is told, but still boldly and always calling a spade a spade. It is a gripping drama of a few simple people who live along the waterfront of Marseilles, the Port of Seven Seas. Under the able handling of James Whale, one of our better directors, the human values are developed by a series of performances as fine as any we ever have had on the screen. In the superfluous footage at the beginning the same degree of excellence is reflected, but there it means nothing. Henry Henigson, producer in charge, is to be complimented upon a well done physical job, and my sympathy goes out to Preston Sturges for his being put under the strain of having to stretch four reels of story into eight reels of picture. At that, it was adroit writing which became beautiful, sincere, compelling when he finally reached the story.

Maureen, Beery, Morgan, et al. . . .

WE MUST cease regarding Maureen O'Sullivan as just a sweet little Irish colleen. The young woman is an actress with a great capacity for feeling the part she plays. Here she has a part which must earn and hold our sympathy in spite of the moral lapse. Maureen does it beautifully, makes us love her, respect her. That able artist with the camera, Karl Freund, gives us some portraits of her which combine loveliness and character, intelligence and feeling, in a graphic and wholly artistic manner. Her eyes are Maureen's greatest means of expression, as they must be with all screen actresses. Wally Beery never gave a better performance than the one he contributes to Port of Seven Seas. It is a more subtle part than most of those he has played, demanding more from within, more mental than physical, more tender, more understanding. Frankly, I did not think he could play such a part so ably. I was getting a little tired of the constant repetition of what I had become to believe was the only characterization Frank Morgan could give us—and no doubt he, too, was tiring of it—but here we have him in a different role which he plays as only a really able actor could play it. Jessie Ralph also must be credited with a fine performance. We see John Beal for only a few minutes, but the part is an important one and he handles it well. The period of the picture gave Dolly Tree an opportunity to provide the women with picturesque costumes, an opportunity she avails herself of to the full.

HOW TO DIRECT DIALOGUE . . .

• RECKLESS LIVING; Universal; director, Frank McDonald; original story, Gerald Beaumont; screen play, Charles Grayson; photographer, Elwood Bredell; musical director, Charles Previn; music, Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson; film editor, Frank Gross; art direction, Jack Otterson and Chas. H. Clarke. Cast: Robert Wilcox, Nan Grey, Jimmy Savo, William Lundigan, Frank Jenks, Harry Davenport, May Boley, Charles Judels, Harlan Briggs. Eddie Anderson.

WHAT intelligent direction of dialogue will do for a motion picture in the way of making it entertaining, is demonstrated by this low-budget Universal production. Frank McDonald, whose work I have watched with interest for the past few years as I could see in it promise of a brilliant future, presents us with a group of people and enlists our interest in them by the simple expedient of presenting them as people and not as actors. And the way he does that is to have them converse like people, not like actors. The dialogue does not come at us in a series of verbal detonations; we sit back, relax, and listen to the story as it is told in conversations between those involved in it. The camera takes us close to the speakers, consequently we have no difficulty in hearing what they say even when they whisper. Strange how few of even our biggest directors have learned that simple little thing about pictures. All but a handful of them make their players shout to reach a distant audience. McDonald and the few other intelligent directors make their players speak just loud enough to reach the microphone. It is easy to entertain us with a picture made intelligently, as there is nothing to irritate us, nothing to distract our attention from the meaning of what is happening on the screen.

Plenty of Horse Atmosphere . . .

THIS picture is for and about horse lovers and those who follow the races. We have had plenty of pictures which included horse race sequences, but here is one that deals with nothing else, that never gets farther than a stone's throw from a race track. It certainly should interest those for whom it was made, those who condone betting on the ponies and like to see them run, but how it will strike the rest of the populace is something which will have to be left to the box-office to determine. McDonald never lets the story get outside the atmosphere of the paddock, and Universal expertly works in scores of thousands of extras who bought places on the screen when they paid their way through Santa Anita turnstiles at the recent meeting. The picture thus has great scope,

several stirring race scenes and well sustained race track atmosphere, all gathered by busy cameras and without bulging the budget. But extras are extras, whether paid or not.

Comedy Possibilities Developed . . .

IJHEN dialogue is directed intelligently, it is not difficult to get good performances. There are no big box-office names in Reckless Living, but all the acting is made sincere and impressive by its lack of acting effort. No player can over-act when he reads his lines in ordinary conversational tones without striving to reach an audience. In this picture each character says what he has to say only to the person or persons he is addressing, thus making each of his scenes sincere. Comedy possibilities are developed fully in both writing and direction, and a streak of healthy sentiment winds in and out throughout the narrative. All in all it is a nice little bit of entertainmen which interested me most in its demonstration of the fact that Frank McDonald is quite ready to be entrusted with the direction of something bigger. I was interested also in the appearance in the cast of Jimmy Savo, one of the world's greatest pantomimists who would be a sensational success in a part which gave him an opportunity to display all his wares.

EXCEEDINGLY NOISY OFFERING . . .

● BATTLE OF BROADWAY; 20th Century-Fox; executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; director, George Marshall; story, Norman Houston; screen play, Lou Breslow and John Patrick; photographer, Barney McGill; songs, Sidney Clare and Harry Akst; music director, Samuel Kaylin; dance direction, Nick Castle and Geneva Sawyer; film editor, Jack Murray. Cast Victor McLaglen, Brian Donlevy, Louise Hovick. Raymond Walburn, Lynn Bari, Jane Darwell, Robert Kellard, Sammy Cohen, Esther Muir, Eddie Holden, Hattie McDaniel, Paul Irving, Frank Moran, Andrew Tombes.

TERY loud. There is an amusing story in it, but it is told in a series of rattlety-bang vocal explosions, hard on ears and nerves and making the picture not worth the discomfort it will cause you to sit through it. A letter from a producer in the morning mail tells me it is unfair of me to apply the same standard of criticism to both class A and class B productions, that in expressing an opinion of one of the latter I should be influenced by the fact that the director had to keep within a restricted budget and could not devote as much time to shooting as the directors of big pictures are allowed. If it costs more to shoot a scene in which the players converse like ordinary people than it does to shoot one in which they shout at one another, then there would be a financial reason for the continuous upproar that is named Battle of Broadway. I can see no relation between the title and the story, and it may be that a commendable attempt was made to justify the title by making the picture sound like a battle.

When Noise Is Just Noise . . .

THE picture is offered as a light but boisterous comedy; it has a good enough cast, an adequate production, and could have been one of the brightest laughproducers of the season if it had been directed with

some regard for the meaning of lines. One cannot object to noise in a scene which demands it. The terrific noise of the wind in Hurricane is what makes it so thrilling. When a character is infuriated, there is no objection to his shouting. It is the natural expression of his feelings and gives the scene its dramatic strength. But take this scene in Battle of Broadway. Two players at a table in a night club urge a third to make love to a young man to break up his romance with a girl whom his father does not wish him to marry. The floor is crowded with tables at which are seated delegates to an American Legion convention in New York. The principals converse in tones only a little short of shouts-and not a sound is heard from any other table, even though the Legionaires are carrying on a celebration in which strong drink is figuring largely. Every word the plotters utter could be head by everyone in the room.

Has Well Written Script . . .

EVERY scene in a picture derives its strength from the degree of plausibility it possesses. Even the most absurd scene can be made plausible if it is consistent with the mood the picture has established. The scene I mention demanded heads together and low tones to make it authentic as an amusing bit of plotting. But it, and every other scene in the picture, are presented in a purely mechanical manner and without any regard for meaning as part of the story. As presented, the picture will cause laughter—it gave me some hearty laughs-but as an exhibition of failure to develope all possibilities of a script, it is deplorable. However, when its turn comes on a double bill I see no reason why you should walk out on it. As a matter of fact, I followed it with interest, and even though I deplored the manner of its presentation, I admired the sense of comedy values revealed in the writing of the script. It has a whole lot of merit.

ANOTHER MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN . . .

● GOODBYE BROADWAY: Universal; associate producer, Edmund Grainger; director, Ray McCarey; play, James A. Gleason; screen play, Roy Chanslor and A. Dorian Otvos; photographer, George Robinson; music director, Charles Previn; film editor, Maurice Wright. Cast: Alice Brady, Charles Winninger, Tom Brown, Dorothea Kent, Tommy Riggs, Frank Jenks, Jed Prouty, Willie Best, Donald Meek, Henry Roquemore, Del Henderson.

THERE is no excuse for this picture being as bad as it is. It so easily could have been made into an amusing bit of entertainment, but it comes to the screen as just another missed opportunity. I suppose Edmund Grainger, the producer of Goodbye Broadway, draws one of those fancy salaries so common among studio executives and based on the assumption that those who draw them know ten times as much about pictures as their productions reveal they do. In any event, Grainger accepted from Roy Chanslor and Dorian Otvos a script consisting entirely of dialogue and without suggesting in even one scene that the producer and writers were aware there

is such a thing as screen art. That, in itself, was not so bad, as it is in keeping with the present custom of permitting talk to substitute for picture brains; but when Ray McCarey, director, got hold of the script, he saw to it that the dialogue was hurled at us with all the lack of consideration a machine gun shows our aural nerves. In only one scene do the players talk like human beings engaged in an ordinary conversation. And that is what Producer Grainger gives us as his conception of screen entertainment to relax us after a wearing day at our places of business.

Not the Story's Fault . . .

THE implausibilities with which the story bristles are not necessarily a drawback. Still more goofy scripts have been made into ingratiating entertainment by the simple expedient of giving them intelligent direction, by establishing and sustaining a mood consistent with their goofiness. But McCarey gives us a picture consisting entirely of shouted dialogue, expressionless chatter without light and shade to develope its comedy values. I see the next picture he is to direct has Victor McLagen as its star, a promotion from the machine-gun to the Big Bertha division. Under his direction we can expect something high, wide and handsome in the way of noise when Vic goes into action. Of course, as Charles Rogers, head of Universal, no doubt will argue, Goodbye Broadway is just a class B production, but, even so, I can see no reason why the B should stand for "bellowing." About the only difference I have been able to detect between the average class A and class B picture is the respective direction given them. Even the poorest script can be made into a plausible picture merely by making the players act like ordinary human beings with enough intelligence to be aware of the meaning of what they are saying. But first, of course, the producer and director must have that degree of intelligence.

Story Is About Money . . .

THE scene in which the director apparently forgot himself and permitted the players to converse as two human beings would, is played by Alice Brady and Charlie Winninger, two sterling troupers whose abilities are wasted throughout the remainder of the film. There is a romance which has nothing to do with the story, the parties to it being Dorothea Kent, who lacks personality, and Tom Brown, always an agreeable young fellow. A constitutional weakness of the story is that it is purely material, its main element being the money saved by Miss Brady and Winninger in twenty years of trouping, but that weakness could have been nullified by better treatment of the story as a whole. Donald Meek gives one of those brilliant performances we always can expect when we see his name in a cast. The others struggle as well as they can in the general din. I was interested in seeing Tommy Riggs, the clever young fellow who created Betty Lou. I was under the impression he was a ventriloquist, but discovered he is

(Continued on page 10)

EXHIBITORS' MONTHLY BUYING GUIDE

★ The first Spectator in March had only seventeen pictures to present in its Buyers' Guide, as February had established a new low in the number of previews. March, however, picked up somewhat, the Spectators in that month carrying twenty-seven reviews of previewed pictures, among them being some which should gladden the hearts of exhibitors. Signs of the times point to one of those mental revolutions Hollywood production executives indulge in whenever box-office behavior shows a downward tendency. Metro has ruled out class B productions, which means nothing at all except that none of its pictures will be called Bs. Exhibitors will get from Leo just what it has been getting—good and bad pictures, the good predom-

inating. It looks as if producers have realized what the Spectator predicted a year ago, that musicals and spectacles can not be presented on an ever ascending scale to hold the interest of audiences. There will be fewer of them hereafter. As yet there seems to be no realization on the part of producers of the harm being done box-offices by the excessive amount of dialogue each picture carries, but there is hope that producer intelligence may yet develope to the point of realization of that elemental fact. There is a healthy movement towards less noise in pictures, but it probably will take years for producers to grasp the fact that the public does not like to be forced at night to buy the noise it has been trying all day to get away from. Now the past month's reviews.

(The figure after each title denotes date in March on which the review appeared in the Spectator)

COLUMBIA

★ THERE'S ALWAYS A WOMAN (26)—One of the brightest comedies of the season and one which should gladden the hearts of exhibitors lucky enough to get it. Joan Blondell, whom your people surely must like, is at her best in this one; Melvyn Douglas is fine and Al Hall's direction is responsible for most expert telling of a story which has the unusual quality of keeping us laughing nearly all the time even though there are two gruesome murders in it. Don't be afraid of this one. Running time, 82 minutes.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

- ★ MERRILY WE LIVE (5)—One of those screwy comedies the public is eating up, and will continue to eat up as long as the standard of the present crop is maintained by those which will follow it. Hal Roach has given it a handsome setting and an evenly balanced cast contributes excellent performances. The names of Constance Bennett, Billie Burke, Brian Aherne and Alan Mowbray should mean something to your customers, but in any event you can promise a lot in the way of gay entertainment. Running time, 90 minutes.
- ★ GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST (19)—Drags, to my way of thinking; is much too long and the least entertaining of the Jeanette MacDonald-Nelson Eddy pictures, but by no means a total loss as the singing of both the stars is superb as usual. Strong cast and attractive setting, but the direction is rather matter-of-fact and does not develope all the human possibilities. If you have to show it do not promise too much. Running time, 120 minutes.
- ★ THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS (19)—Triangle theme, the husband's business being the third party. Robert Montgomery and Virginia Bruce head a good cast. Direction just so-so. Not a particularly interesting picture and you should go lightly in exploiting it. Running time, 75 minutes.
- ★ JUDGE HARDY'S CHILDREN (26)—From the review: "Family audiences will eat it up. Judge Hardy's Children is one of the best of the recent films dealing with American family life." Micky Rooney scored heavily with the preview audience, and Lewis Stone and the other members of the family are as convincing and entertaining as in the last picture of the series. This time the Hardys go to Washington, D.C., where they become involved in political intrigue. Running time, 70 minutes.

MONOGRAM

★ THE PORT OF MISSING GIRLS (5)—Less exacting audiences of the neighborhood theatres will find it sustains their interest and tells a diverting tale. There are some pleasant musical interludes sung by Judith Allen; and a picturesque depiction of a Shanghai den, as well as an exciting fight between a band of coolies and members of a ship's crew, help the film along. But unfortunately there are some rather large holes in the story and the camera work tends to be stiff. Harry Carey is capable, and Betty Compson and Milburn Stone are assets. But do not bank heavily on it. Running time, 60 minutes.

PARAMOUNT

- ★ BLUEBEARDS EIGHTH WIFE (26)—The old Lubitsch again at his best. Two big-box-office names, Claudette Colbert and Gary Cooper head the cast list, and for good measure you have also the name of Edward Everett Horton to dangle before the eyes of your public. A gay comedy which will drive away dull care from your audiences and red ink from your trial balance. Running time, 85 minutes.
- ★ HER JUNGLE LOVE (26)—Dorothy Lamour again in few clothes and a jungle setting. Weak story in which the characters are victims of circumstances and have little to say about what goes on. Might be all right for your Saturday audiences as the young customers may like it. Done in technicolor and pretty to look at, if that means anything down your way. Running time, 78 minutes.
- ★ TIP OFF GIRLS (26)—Has some novel material in the story, which exposes a racket of hi-jacking cargoes from trucks on the highways at night, the enterprise being conducted by a smoothy with trucks and a warehouse of his own, as well as a wholesale business operated as a blind. The hi-jacking is generally accomplished through the aid of a young woman who lies in the road as if in sorry distress or, lugging a suitcase, bums a ride from a driver. The pace of the yarn is good and there is suspense. Parent-Teachers groups, however, might consider the enterprise a bit too romantically pictured for youthful minds. Running time, 60 minutes.
- ★ BULLDOG DRUMMOND'S PERIL (26)—Holds the interest much better than the last of this series, and is generally of an improved texture. The climax is exciting, during which Drummond puts on a Doug Fairbanks act, hurdling chairs and tables as he defends himself with a sabber against the mean tongue of a Gaucho whip. The

points involved in the solution might have been stressed a little more, and motor vehicles get pretty noisy in one sequence, but, everything considered, the piece is a satisfactory little mystery story. Running time, 66 minutes.

R-K-O

- ★ HAWAII CALLS (5)—Bobby Breen picture which should demonstrate the box-office value of a sustained pleasant atmosphere. Bobby is in good voice and plays his part pleasantly. Picture has educational value easy to take in the way of authentic Hawaiian scenes. The playing of the well exploited Ray Paige orchestra is a selling point. Well up to the Bobby Breen standard; one you need not be afraid of. Running time, 71 minutes.
- ★ CONDEMNED WOMEN (19)—A really good prison picture, this time using a woman's prison. Exceedingly well directed by Lew Landers. Lacks outstanding boxoffice names, but Sally Eilers gives her best performance to date, and the agreeable Louis Hayward will please your customers. Graphic presentation of prison routine, softened somewhat by well developed romance. More for thoughtful people than for those who take their entertainment on the run. Exploit it for what it is and your people will be satisfied. Running time, 85 minutes.
- *NIGHT SPOT (19)—Fairly good B melodrama. Whangdoodle, but told with a certain dash. Joan Woodbury is pleasing. There are some musical portions, the piece has a pretty good pace and suspense at the climax. Will hold its own on the double bills. Running time, 60 minutes.
- * THIS MARRIAGE BUSINESS (19)—Will appeal to those of your patrons who liked Make Way for Tomorrow. Add to that a young-love story and a political background and you have enough material for good exploitation. Victor Moore just about makes the picture good enough to hold up the heavy end of a dualer. A little plugging will sell the tickets you need for a profit. Running time, 70 minutes.
- ★ MAID'S NIGHT OUT (19)—If you have a chance take a short subject instead of this one. Your patrons will have nothing good to say for it—and that means nothing good to say for you. If you must play it, tie it up with a big A so that your people will not expect too much. Running time, 60 minutes.
- ★ LAW OF THE UNDERWORLD (26)—Is something they shot while waiting for takes on another picture. There are names to sell—but no story to sell them on. Chester Morris, Anne Shirley, Walter Abel and Eduardo Cianelli. This gangster picture makes a hero of its heavy—which ought to give you an idea of how the PTA and other similar organizations will feel about its showing. Running time, 60 minutes.
- ★ JOY OF LIVING (26)—You are pretty safe when you see the names of Garnett as director and Towne and Baker as writers in a picture's credits. In this one they have given us another of those screwy comedies, but this one has the virtue of possessing a serious theme which its title suggests—the joy of living. Irene Dunne and young Douglas Fairbanks bring it to life in a manner which will please your audiences. It should be good fare for all ages and tastes; one you can exploit without reservation. Running time, 90 minutes

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

★ SALLY, IRENE AND MARY (5)—Just one of those screwy musical things of which your people no doubt are growing tired. Nothing new or novel in it, not much to ex-

ploit unless the names of Alice Faye and Tony Martin mean something in your community. Running time, 73 minutes.

- ★ REBECCA OF SUNNYBROOK FARM (12)— Shirley Temple. I think that is about all your customers will want to know. This great personality is her usual charming self. The atmosphere of the original story is not retained in the picture, an entirely new locale being presented. Nor does the screen story amount to much, but Shirley's charm compensates for whatever weakness the story reveals. She is growing up, but still is, and always will be, the same Shirley the world has grown to love. Running time, 80 minutes.
- **RAWHIDE (19)—This is a good bet for childrens' matinees, though there is a hardiness and ebullience about the piece which should appeal to adult audiences of the neighborhood houses. It is a good Western, as such films go. A good selling point is the appearance of Lou Gehrig, who is a "natural" as an actor, and puts on a keen demonstration of pitching with billiard balls. Running time, 58 minutes.
- ★ ISLAND IN THE SKY (19)—Gets off to a bad start, being talkative and slow. When the picture eventually snaps out of it, however, it has a good tempo, develops suspense, and generally turns out to be satisfactory B entertainment. The climax is punchy. About gangsters, night club life, a murder, and such. Suitable for the double bills. Running time, 65 minutes.
- ★ TRIP TO PARIS (26)—One of the best of the Jones Family Series—and sure to please everyone. An excellent cast and good direction with enough tie-up angles to help you put the picture over. If you have had good fortune with your Jones Series before, a little clever exploitation will make the register ring this time. Running time, 64 minutes.
- ★ MR. MOTO'S GAMBLE (26)—One of the best of the Moto series. There are some prize fight scenes which are well staged and hold some stark drama. Production values are good, the plot interest-sustaining. By a clever piece of strategy in the casting and dialogue the characters are tied in with those in the Charlie Chan series. If your patrons go for the rather exotic Mr. Moto they will like this film. Running time, 60 minutes.

UNIVERSAL

- ★ MAD ABOUT MUSIC (5)—In every way outstanding, one everyone will love. Its appeal is emotional, therefore it provides universal entertainment; for young, old and all degrees of intelligence. One of the sweetest pictures ever made, yet it is full of laughs. Deanna Durbin, if her present pace is maintained, by the end of the year will be regarded as the screen's most charming personality. You may exploit this one to the limit, make all the promises you like; the picture will make good all you can say about it. Running time, 100 minutes.
- ★ THE CRIME OF DR. HALLET (19)—If your patrons like a good solid picture that has names, plot and a good human story then by all means play this one. Here is intelligent film fare that will please all of your people and is good enough to hold up the heavier portion of a double bill program. Good promotion should make this a good box office winner for you. But this is the kind of picture that is made by word of mouth. Running time, 65 minutes.

WARNER BROTHERS

★ JEZEBEL (19)—Really great, but perhaps a bit too fine for audiences who prefer plainer fare. Bette Davis (Continued on page 12)

PREVIEWS

(Continued from page 7)

not, that he makes no effort to conceal his lip movement when Betty Lou is speaking. The pleasantest portion of the picture is its opening which is given all too brief musical treatment by that accomplished musician, Charles Previn.

SHOULD RATE GOOD BOOKINGS . . .

● ROSE OF THE RIO GRANDE; Monogram picture and release; Scott R. Dunlap in charge of production: associate producer, Dorothy Reid; directed by William Nigh; screen play by Dorothy Reid and Ralph Bettinson; from an original story by Johnston McCulley; musical director, Hugo Riesenfeld; photography, Gilbert Warrenton; film editor, Russell Schoengarth; technical director, E. R. Hickson; assistant director, W. B. Eason; "Ride Amigos Ride," "What Care I?" and "Song of the Rose," music by Charles Rosoff, lyrics by Eddie Cherkose. Cast: Movita, John Carroll, Antonio Moreno, Lina Basquette, George Cleveland, Guido Corrado, Duncan Renaldo, Don Alvarado, Martin Garralaga, Rose Turich.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

MONOGRAM's newest release and one of the studio's most ambitious efforts to date, Rose of the Rio Grande, made its debut at the studio the other evening, with the screen flanked on either side by much goodly potato salad, cold meats and liquid refreshments, awaiting the celebration which was to follow on the completion of its showing. Keeping my judgment as objective as I could under such gastronomic stimulus and the heady festivity in the air, I judged the film to be a vigorously told romance, tuneful, and colorfully mounted. It has taken perfectly legitimate liberties with reality, being a romance, and its story is told in bold, flamboyant strokes. Emphasis is on action, which carries through to the climax with a good narrative swing and commendable directness.

Has Historical Interest . . .

CONSIDERABLE historical interest there is too in this screen play by Dorothy Reid and Ralph Bettinson, from an original by Johnston McCulley. It is laid in Mexico of a hundred years ago, and tells of the efforts of a small band of aristocrats to regain the freedom of their Rio Grande country from the oppressive rule of a bandit army, the likes of which were then ravaging the countryside of Mexico and undertaking to exterminate the aristocracy. The film is replete with music of good quality; it has competent direction and sufficient good performances. With a larger budget to work with, an outstanding film might have resulted. The present picture, however, should not want for good bookings.

Singing Actor Registers . . .

JOHN CARROLL appears as the romantic aristocrat, El Cato—The Cat of the Mountains—and quite carries off the picture. He is top-rung timber if I am any judge at all. Of imposing stature, handsome, a good actor, and possessed of a rich and expressive singing voice, he has all the prerequisites for achieving a position among the outstanding screen players. El Cato he plays with subtlety, swagger,

elan. Where from? His agent assures me Carroll is from the New York stage; the Monogram publicity boys inform me that he hails from Florida, where he was a beach comber, or virtually one, and came to Hollywood to seek his fortune upon the advice of enthusiastic friends. I suppose it really doesn't matter, now that he is here. With box-office receipts what they are, Hollywood can use strong personalities.

Latin Players Predominate . . .

NUMEROUS of our Latin friends are seen again in the cast. Movita—or is she from the islands?—very comely, appears as a young aristocrat obliged to disguise herself as a cabaret entertainer. If she is not always equal to her heavier emotional scenes, she is engaging in the lighter ones. Antonio Moreno made a welcome appearance as the bandit captain, playing with poise and emphasis. He and El Cato, resplendent in bandit officers' uniforms—El Cato's being a disguise—put on a swell sabber duel. Guess who gets it through the tummy. A tempestuous little creature of the cabarets is created by Lina Basquette, who also dances, and with verve and grace. Of the other supporting players, Guido Corrado is outstanding for his amusing performance as Carpo, an aid to El Cato.

Director Is Versatile . . .

IJILLIAM NIGH, directing, has done well with the resources at his command. He seems to be a director of considerable versatility, this swaggering opus being a far cry from some of the human-interest stories he has directed in the past, and ably, I recall. Of the music, by Charles Rosoff tnd Eddie Cherkose, Ride Amigos Ride and What Care I? were most impressive. The composers evidently aimed at writing music of operetta quality, and in no small measure their music possesses such quality. The forcefully accented strains of Ride Amigos I can actually recall to mind, which is more than I can say after hearing most of the music composed for the talking screen. Hugo Riesenfeld has provided most of the songs with musical settings which enhance their spirit, though the prominence of the piano as an accompaniment when Carroll is singing in the forest, was disconcerting, the more so considering that in the picture he was being accompanied by guitars. Strings would have been more fitting, or a full orchestral ensemble, about which there is a certain abstractness. But a piano in the forest! And is it too late for the recording engineer to cut down the volume of the voices of El Cato's band as they ride off, singing, into the distance? Credit is due Cameraman Gilbert Warrenton for a series of tastefully lighted shots.

LIGHT BUT ENTERTAINING ...

• PENROD'S DOUBLE TROUBLE; Warners release of a First National picture; associate producer, Bryan Foy; directed by Lew Seiler; based on the Penrod stories by Booth Tarkington; screen play by Crane Wilbur; adapted by Ernest Booth; assistant director, Drew Eberson; dialogue direction by Hugh Cummings; photographed by Arthur Todd; art direction by

Hugh Reticker; film editor, Frank Dewar; sound by Francis J. Scheid; dance numbers by Matty King; unit manager, Louis Baum; gowns by N'Was McKenzie. Cast: Billy Mauch, Bobby Mauch, Dick Purcell, Gene Lockhart, Kathleen Lockhart, Hugh O'Connell, Charles Halton, Bernice Pilot, Jackie Morrow, Phillip Hurlic.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

CHILDREN will like it tremendously, and grown-ups who have children of their own or are very fond of youngsters will probably find the piece amusing too, as well as emotionally provocative. Those whose tastes run to Huxley and Cabell, however, should be wary, for this is light fare. Though the story is told with no great finesse, the children who dominate much of the action lend a certain ebullience to the film; there is good movement and a climax which is spectacular and gratifying, a band of boys having caught the neck of one of the culprits between the window sill and a board, which is nailed fast, allowing a little negro fellow to deliver a sound and prolonged paddling to the victim's posterior. Some of the comedy devices are a bit obvious and sometimes the film leans rather heavily on the sentimental side, yet there are several first-rate performances, and the picture, generally speaking, is of good texture for a B product. Whether it will entertain you depends largely on your affinity with the subject matter.

Alike Twins Are Likeable...

BILLY AND BOBBY MAUCH appearing respectively as Penrod and an orphan waif called Danny—and I am not at all certain that the "respectively" is applicable—are two very talented and likeable youngsters. Though they have grown considerably since making their debut in pictures, their alikeness remains almost uncanny. Sometimes when they are together one thinks he can detect certain slight dissimilarities, but when they are separated he finds that he can never be sure of which is which. Pictures have never had anything quite like them, and properly handled they should enjoy popular favor for an indefinite period of years. The time will soon roll around when they will be of sufficient maturity to manifest interest in the fair sex, and the amusing plot complications which can be centered around them then are almost limitless.

United They Stand

If WARNER BROTHERS is planning any such future for the boys, though, I think the kind of story material in which they are being featured should be greatly changed. There are two principle reasons why a story such as Penrod does not show the Mauch youngsters to the best advantage. In the first place, the assumption that two children could be unrelated and unknown to each and yet so remarkably alike that even their parents cannot tell them apart, is an improbability bordering on the impossible, and constitutes a basic story weakness, which a spectator must bring himself to overlook before he can lend his interest and sympathy to the characters and story. Always this improbability hovers over the story, robbing it of conviction. In the second place, the Mauch

twins are stronger as a team. They complement each other's work, for one thing; and for another, the remarkableness of their alikeness is given greater emphasis when the two are seen together. In the present story, the two boys do not meet until its very end, and though individually they are amusing and appealing, yet the more experienced players, Gene and Kathleen Lockhart in especial, come near to carrying off the picture. The Mauch boys should appear on the screen as brothers.

Seasoned Troupers Impress...

ENE AND KATHLEEN LOCKHART, however, U could afford serious competition to any players. Well-schooled troupers, they make the most of their roles as father and mother to Penrod, and show us some very convincing emotions when the boy, who has ascended in a run-away balloon, is believed to be kidnapped. Another capable performance is that of Hugh O'Connell as the unctuous Professor Caligostro, who brings the orphan boy to their home with the object of collecting a five-thousand-dollar reward. Then there is Dick Purcell, forsaking his virtue of the past and making of himself a dissolute culprit; and with such success that one hopes he will take to drink and the downward path frequently in the future. Others outstanding in the cast are Charles Halton and Phillip Hurlic, the latter being Verman, a little negro shaver who is very alert to what goes on about him.

Has Sundry Merits...

IRECTOR LEWIS SEILER has gotten a good D deal of humor into the lighter portions, after the best Our Gang comedy tradition, and has handled the heavier portions, as I have intimated, with sensitiveness. The screen play is by Crane Wilbur, and is a smooth and logical job, judged by the standards of the type of picture this was intended to be. A commendable feature of the film is the generous use of musical accompaniment through the scenes, adding inestimable spirit and emotional appeal. Perhaps the music consists of stock recordings, since I see no one credited with it, but it serves its purpose well. There is a rendition of the Big Apple in a party scene, staged by Matty King, which is very hi-dee-ho and adds color to the film. I am tempted to say that the picture has a "Bryan Foy touch", only I am not certain just what I would mean by that. Something, though.

QUITE A WORTHY EFFORT . . .

• IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND: a Bernard B. Ray productions written and directed by Bernard B. Ray: production manager. Leo Taub: dialogue. Carl Krusada: photography. Plinny Goodfriend: special effects. Ray Mercer: music composed, arranged and conducted by Modest Altschuler: recording. Glen Glenn: film editor. Robert Jahns. Cast: Byron Foulger. Constance Bergen. Betty Roadman. Lynton Brent. Reviewed by Robert Joseph

ANSWER to Martin Quigley's flippant retort, "Go get a camera!" is well answered in Bernard B. Ray's It's All In Your Mind. Producer-Director-Author Ray has no special message to impart. What

he does want to show, however, is a motion picture photoplay off the beaten track—and he succeeds to a commendable degree. By admission and pronouncement It's All In Your Mind, at present without definite release commitments, is scheduled as an exploitation picture. Which is another way of saying lurid marquee titles and posters will stress the sex angle in order to sell the picture. It is not the purpose of the Spectator to moralize or even to tell a producer how to merchandise his picture. Yet, it seems that Mr. Ray is starting off with the wrong foot. It's All In Your Mind is a worthy effort and should not be relegated to such a fate. A series of pictures of this kind should do well.

Camerawork, Music Excellent . . .

AMERAMAN PLINNY GOODFRIEND and Special Effectsman Ray Mercer have got some good camera work into the picture. There is a minimum of dialogue and therefore a gratifying reliance on the camera to tell the story. Reminiscent of the best of Russian and German work of Lang, Pudovkin, Pabst and others these men have used their equipment with telling force-and without being too arty. There are many interesting shots and a variety of camera angles. To Modest Altschuler who composed, arranged and conducted the music must go much credit for making the picture as sprightly and as intelligent as it is. One of the finest things I have heard in a long time is the musical motif that accompanies the actions of the hen-pecking wife. I am not at all musical, but I believe this motif approximates in spirit and in mood the Til Eulenspiegel passages. I was jarred, however, by Altschuler's excessive use of well known jazz pieces. Aside from this one disturbing note I felt the musical background was excellent.

Story Simply Told . . .

THE story of It's All In Your Mind is the essence of simplicity. Henpecked and repressed husband Byron Foulger, tired of his slovenly wife Betty Roadman, makes all sorts of attempts to live a fuller romantic life, finally succeeds with the aid of pretty gold-digging Constance Bergen. Lynton Brent, the boy friend, intercedes, Byron Foulger is cured of his romantic notions, returns some firm funds which he had stolen, goes home to his wife to find her just as interesting as any other woman. The story, of course, is slight, and is supposed to be. However, it does permit dramatic latitude for the players. Constance Bergen stood out as the conniving street tramp and Byron Foulger as the henpecked spouse. However, the sameness of his facial expression, through all sorts of emotional disturbances, did not ring true.

Word for the Cutter . . .

BY REASONS of budget limitations It's All In Your Mind uses a number of stock shots and a series of montages for time lapse effects. It is to the credit of Film Editor Robert Jahns that the picture flows as smoothly as it does and that the narrative is tight and continuous. The editing of a picture of

this type determines its filmic fate. Poor editing means a poor picture, for Director Ray did not have the opportunity to shoot at random for self protection. Every foot of film had to count; Robert Jahns succeeded in doing just that. It's All In Your Mind is a distinctive picture. It is not an outstanding one, but represents an effort to use the camera intelligently and effectively. By comparison with The Eternal Mask, a Swiss picture that was outstanding in my mind, it is a very poor effort. But this much must be said: The people who worked in it had courage—and an idea. It is a pity that its commercial success will depend on its sex-salability.

BUYERS' GUIDE

(Continued from page 9)

in her greatest performance and one of the greatest performances ever given on the screen. Strong cast, elaborate production beautifully photographed. Direction by William Wyler outstanding. Whenever you see the name of Henry Blanke as associated producer of a Warner picture it is a good guess it will please your patrons. This one is not for Saturday showing, but will satisfy the best audiences which assemble during the week. An almost continuous musical score helps a lot. Running time, 100 minutes.

★ FOOLS FOR SCANDAL (26)—Farcical, fast, foolish, funny; with Carole Lombard's established box-office rating and memory of Fernand Gravet's previous performances to give it standing with your patrons. This one should give real satisfaction and will make good your promises. Running time, 80 minutes.



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MABEL KEEFER

THALLENGE TO AMERICA AND GREAT BRITAIN: After seeing some motion pictures taken in Germany and Russia last summer by Dr. R. S. Snyder, well known as a world traveler and student of international and national affairs, I am forced to reluctant admiration for the astuteness of the powers that be in those two countries, in that they realize the potency of dramatization. Viewing the pictures of their parades and ceremonials; their youth camps and all the attendant drilling that shows up so well on the screen, one understands how the imagination of a people is fired by these things. And while these countries are training their youth to worship pagan gods, or, to make a god of physical culture, what are America and Great Britain doing to inculcate in their youth pride of democracy, and worship of the one God in whom they profess to believe? While there are youth movements in this country and, I assume, in Great Britain, they are not dramatized as the Nazis or Communists (or whatever they are now in Russia) would dramatize them. People in general know nothing about them. There should be pageantry and ceremony put on the screen and shown throughout Great Britain and Americaparticularly America, because of the nature of its population.

One of Dr. Snyder's pictures showed a flag pole from which the swastika floated. There were two young lads standing guard—one on either side of the pole—a guard of honor. We should be given a picture of the youth of Great Britain and the United States standing guard over three flags—the flags of both nations, with the flag of the church in the middle. And the flag of the church would mean neither the Church of England, nor Catholic or Protestant, but Christianity. The logical locale for this would be the Canadian border—the International Peace Garden. It should be a demonstration to instill in the minds and hearts of the youth of these two great democracies a deep pride in, and thankfulness for, their freedom; freedom of speech and press; freedom from regimentation, but most of all, freedom of worship. That, with a full realization that there are ways of fighting for an objective without taking up arms, would send the tones of the Doxology rolling and reverberating from the unarmed Canadian frontier to the farthest corners of the earth. It needs only a spark to fire the imagination of youth, and with a little effort we might find it easier than we think to drown out the pagan chorus, with "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." We sit back in smug complacency, with a superior smile for the dramatic fireworks employed by the dictator nations to achieve

their goal. Meanwhile, paganism and all it implies is on the march.

DURING a scene in Gold Is Where You Find It—where Mr. Ferris talks to his son in the wheat field—I was greatly perturbed because of my inability to ask the son to step aside so I could get a better view of his horse. The occasional glimpse of an eye and an ear, or the star in the horse's forehead, was tantalizing. I knew I should like that horse immensely if only I were given a chance to know him better.

TO MY surprise I find that John Bull was a real person, whereas I always had supposed him to be a figurehead for the British nation. According to a newspaper item he wrote the tune to which "God Save the King" and "My Country 'Tis of Thee" are sung, (more surprise) in 1619, and I would say that he did a thoroughly good job. The tune has a simply dignity that strikes a responsive chord in the heart of the singer or listener, and is the reason for its having lasted for more than three hundred years.

0 • W. HOLMES said: "writing is like shooting with a rifle: you may hit your reader's mind, or miss it." But, after all, when you shoot with a rifle you know when you have made a hit.

MR. HARLEN, in This Hollywood, March 5 issue of the Spectator, speaks of having received word that five million women are to demand the discontinuance of double-feature bills. Would these be the five million women that were behind Mrs. Creevey—Mrs. Luella May Creevey—of First Lady fame? Anyway, more power to them! And there, all ready and waiting, is my plan for a cinematic program that would be a perfect evening's entertainment: Newsreel, Feature, and Musical Short running about thirty minutes. A cartoon could be added on occasion. Studios would consider the suitability of the feature and musical to be shown together, so that one would complement the other.

STRAINS of Yankee Doodle coming over the radio. Now, there is a tune! We should hear it more often. With plenty of drums.

PRISONER OF ZENDA: I have been requested to make a plea to producers for more pictures of that type. Now would that mean more romance (with a capital R) or would it mean more Ronald Colman? There be those who would say that Prisoner of Zenda is pure romantic entertainment and they would be right. But they also would say that the film did not teach anything, and "Oh, my friends and oh, my foes," how wrong they would be. It holds up before us a picture of good sportsmanship—of playing the game.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

ROM France come a film, The Life and Loves of Beethoven, which has been greatly project Beethoven, which has been greatly praised everywhere by film and music authorities, although they have not been unmindful of distinct limitations. The picture is now showing at the Esquire Theater and it appeals not only to the countless lovers of Beethoven music but to film-patrons generally. Director Abel Gance has created a historic period film, which as a chronicle and a visualization of Vienna at the commencement of the 19th century, is enjoyable and profitable to behold. Two of the foremost French orchestra conductors of the day have lent their collaboration. Louis Masson has assembled the score entirely from the music of the master. He has drawn only the greatest and most universally beloved compositions of Beethoven. Philippe Gaubert, also well known in this country by way of numerous phonograph recordings, is responsible for the satisfying sound track, played by the orchestra of the Societé des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris. No less an actor of historic roles than Harry Baur impersonates Beethoven, while Annie Ducaucz and Jany Holt, as Therese von Brunsvick, and Juliette Guicciardi, look astonishingly like the portraits of the two artistocratic women whose portraits I have seen and whose loveliness may well have softened the heart of a Beethoven.

History From A Distance...

PROBLEMS besetting the scenarist, director and compiler of music for a Beethoven film, are so many and so great that the present production must be acknowledged as quite notable in general fidelity of character. The music is well performed, with accuracy of detail and traditional regard for phrasing. Sound is uneven at times, but not to a disturbing degree. Very regrettable, really bad taste, is the vocal adaptation of the opening portion of the Moonlight Sonata, which is heard from an invisible singer to the words of a "Miserere" during the dying hours of the composer. Absence of sound is utilized tellingly to denote Beethoven's deafness. Beethoven's organ improvisation of the funeral march from the Eroica symphony during the wedding of Juliette, is a bit of poetic license, but musically and dramatically telling. Quite lovely are the combination of rural scenes and excerpts from the Pastoral symphony. thunderstorm scene from the same symphony, too, is well realized. Very gratifying is the introduction of the rarely heard, but revealing La Melancolia (from the quartet opus 18 No. 6). This is one of the historically best chosen touches, because Monsieur Masson has employed also music written later than the historic dates of certain incidents shown. The brighter, lighter side of the man Beethoven, who always was in love, the sunnier examples of his musical genius are rather absent from the screen and the score. Nevertheless here is a picture, diverting, and of genuine and moving power. Again it does not preclude the possibilities of a greater, American-made picture based on the same subject.

Song of the Prisoner...

S A matter of fact, there is not a single song in MGM's Last Gangster, at least not a song in the literal sense of the word. But the background music by Edward Ward provides more poignancy than most ballads of one kind or another could have added. The story moves with too much impetus and harshness to permit such a change of tempo. There might have been a temptation to hold high the torchy torch of throaty melody in the scene when the gangster, released from Alcatraz, is taken by his old-time buddy to a joint. Ward has written some forcefully illustrative sequences. There are themes and musical thoughts which rear up, and pace and strain against the confining steel bars of a square cell like animals driven and baffled into restlessness by their penned up energy and resentment against their imprisonment. The uncertainty of destination of the ride on the prison train, the dawning realization of a "long stretch" as the window blinds in the coach are raised. and the prisoners behold the stretch of water of San Francisco Bay which surrounds the "rock" like another wall for which neither ladder nor rope promises escape—emotions and thoughts prompted by these experiences are potently told by the music. A convincingly tough looking cast of actors preserves a semblance of defiance, although even the more "hardboiled eggs" have been given jolt by the mere sight of Alcatraz.

Sentiment Not Sentimentality...

MPOSER WARD deals in sentiments, not in sentimentalities. I trust I am not misunderstanding him when I assert that he has borrowed a fragment from Tschaikowsky's song, Nur Wer die Sehnsuch kennt. It is a song of loneliness and longing. He uses it poignantly, when even the tough guy is filled with concern when the mother of his unborn child is left without his bullish protection and clumsily lavish care. Some really pregnant moments of quiet music occur when his wife tells of the curse looming over the future of their child, because it bears the name of a man imprisoned for murder and bloody racketeering. In turn, Ward underlines the father's disappointment and rage at being deprived the sight of his baby during visiting hours. Not only visually, but musically too, the audience is told that his wife means to him only the mother of his child. As he leaves the prison after a decade, Ward employs again the Tschaikowsky-like theme. Before he starts his search for his child, "Big Joe Krazok's child", the audience knows that freedom first of all means finding his son. Thus music audibly advances the plausibility of the closing scene, of Big

Hollywood Spectator

Joe's outstanding achievement, when he wipes the curse of his name from his son's future with his own life. Not only is the score dramatically, musically, psychologically well done, but the recording, too, is highly satisfactory.

A Damsel In Distress . . .

S I reflect upon the merits of A Damsel in Distress A I am wondering whether the Damsel is not really Dame Music. By that I imply no reflection on the excellent orchestrations and arrangements of Russell Bennett, nor the equally sure and well-timed direction of Victor Barivalli. I mean merely Dame music, the music which on the screen is ascribed to the late George Gershwin. It sounds at times as if the greatly talented American tune-maker and rhythm-juggler had worked against limitations of time and energy as well as inventiveness. The only really brilliant, arresting and wholly amusing number in this RKO production is Fred Astaire's drum-dance. Variety of accent and percussion pitch are simply fascinating. Here is an outstanding example of specifically American amusement music. I am wondering whether some of the more ingenuous touches are not due to the resourceful craftsmanship of Russell Bennett, himself a composer of exceptional rhythmic fertility. There is a degree of musical irony in the use of unexpected percussion of pitch, which rather sounds like Bennett. Except for the tune Foggy Days the songs are of only fair calibre. Selections by a group of very capable madrigal singers, doing old English tunes, however, quite compensate. Reginald Gardner, as the butler, must be mentioned especially, for an episode of quite exceptionally humorous as well as expressive and fine-toned opera solo singing.

Suggesting Another Finale . . .

MUSIC contributes to a vital degree to the success of Warner Bros'. scenes of romance and history of New Orleans in Jezebel. The story and the picture provide ample and diverse opportunities, and Max Steiner is quick and thoughtful in using them. As I have ventured to remark before, since picture music must be judged within the frame of the picture, the music reviewer cannot but wish at times that certain details of action or direction might have been different and thus provided opportunities whence music could have added a significance obtainable only by musical sound, and not by obvious camera effects. The fatalistic heroism and horror of the finale could have been heightened if the stretcher bearers and the tumbril bearing the stricken hero had not joined quite so quickly a veritable parade of vehicles carrying the victims of the epidemic to the isolation island. The vehicle might have proceeded alone for a few seconds of film footage, be gradually joined by similar wagons of possible doom, out of side streets, or across an open square. Overhead, so to speak, might have floated a tonal Te Deum of the living dead, a tolling of bells, chanting of instrumental prayers to a bass of rumbling wheels. Steiner then might have restrung in loosely paralleling melodic

strands the threads of sorrowful, yet hope-quivering, loving melodies, weaving them together as the hero's cart reaches the terror-crowded main thoroughfare.

Underwriting As It Were . . .

NOT that Director William Wyler did not build a stirring climax; not that Steiner failed to increase the emotional impact of this final scene. In fact, by a relatively simple musical device he steps up the stark ardor of this scene during the short moment as a procession of the plague-stricken rolls by through murky clouds of smoke and emotion-choked sound. Steiner does well, too, in the pleasant scenes of this story, such as in the drawing room and ballroom scenes. There are fine touches of taunting musical innuendo when the lovers quarrel. There is a bitter undertone when Jezebel flaunts her unconventionalism in a gay scene of dancers and dance music of the eighteen-fifties. Music and silence, finely timed, tighten the suspense. A poignant viola theme is well chosen for the girl torn between pride and regret. The negro singing on the plantation scene is just a trifle too much of the well rehearsed concert variety. Everything is realistic except the singing of these welcoming negroes. Steiner does some poignant musical writing (underwriting I would say) when Jezebel hovers between ecstasy and remorse. Then follows that stark finale, but of that I have already spoken.

Thank God, No Song . . .

NOTWITHSTANDING the hybrid nature of RKO's score for Condemned Women, much of the music used is telling and unobtrusive. Certain emotional elements in the picture are treated musically in the manner of leit-motifs, yet these connotative themes of tonal mood sketches are varied in accordance with the high or low pressure of the dramatic situation and in keeping with the dramatic development of the story. Dubbing, in that connection, is well managed, dialogue for two and crowd speech is well kept in high relief against emotional mass reactions. This is done without screaming. Here is an implausible story. The restaurant scene at the beginning of the picture is musically weak and the score distracting. On the whole, however, the musical background helps to make a factually unlikely story plausible, as far as human sympathies and emotions the concerned. Music aids in giving the implausible an air of reality. That is a rare achievement. Thanks are due Roy Webb, named on the screen as responsible for the score. It was a relief not to hear the women prisoner's Glee Club or the prison doctor hum a loveballad while making a blood count. Not even the hardboiled prisoner was permitted to sing a song of hate, for which again sincere thanks.

PROVES A VALUABLE AID

THE Spectator has been a valuable aid, not only to us, but to many teachers interested in motion picture art. Your point of view and your firm stand for better pictures are an important part of the motion picture appreciation movement.—Richard B. Lewis, Glendale Junior College.

A REMINDER

We would very much like to hear from you promptly regarding the space you are going to take in the Twelfth Birthday Number of the Spectator. When we get your advertising copy the issue will go to press.

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Twelfth Year

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BRUNO USSHER

Spectator's Authority on Picture Music Makes Some Remarks

BERT HARLEN

Uses "Jezebel" as a Text for Plea for More Psychological Films

MABEL KEEFER

Wise and Witty Woman Covers a Number of Interesting Subjects

ROBERT JOSEPH

Offers Up Lamentations Over the Lost Art of Exhibitor Showmanship



OVERLAND EXPRESS

INVISIBLE ENEMY

LITTLE MISS ROUGHNECK

LIFE AND LOVES OF BEETHOVEN

★ RASCALS

★ SAILING ALONG

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM

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SECRET OF DEANNA'S SUCCESS . . .

THE extraordinary success Deanna Durbin's latest picture, Mad About Music, is meeting with whenever shown, brings sharply to the attention of Hollywood the box-office value of emotion expressed in the simplest terms. Incidentally, it proves also the Spectator's oft repeated contention that emotional entertainment always will be better box-office than purely intellectual entertainment; likewise it proves the soundness of the Spectator's claim that the public is more eager to buy personality than acting. Deanna is great box-office because she has a great, appealing personality. When she records a song she is concerned far more with the story the song tells than she is with the musical skill with which she sings it. She is extraordinarily sensitive to conditions surrounding her. One day she recorded a song in a manner which Joe Pasternak, producer of all her pictures, thought thoroughly satisfactory. But Deanna did not seem to be content with it. It was a cloudy, disagreeable day, and although Deanna had not expressed any dissatisfaction with the manner in which she had sung the number, Joe sensed it. "How would you like to go home now," he asked her, "and come back tomorrow and sing it over? Perhaps it will be a sunny day, warm and pleasant." Deanna agreed enthusiastically. Next day the sky was cloudless, the world looked fine. "When she sang the song again," Joe told me, "it was like something new, something I had not heard before. She was bubbling over with the joy of living and that was the quality she put into her song.'

Honesty and Emotional Impact . . .

PASTERNAK told me something else which illustrates the difference between feeling and acting. Helen Parrish, the meanie in Mad About Music, the girl whose part calls for her to treat Deanna spitefully, in real life is very fond of her. "I just can't be nasty to Deanna," she complained several times to Joe, "I know the scenes will be no good. I love her and can't act as if I hated her." You recall the scene in which the two girls are reconciled, the one in which they embrace and shed happy tears, the one which made you cry more than any other scene in the picture? It got me, too, and not until Joe told me about it could I figure out why it had such a powerful emotional pull. It was the moment in the picture

Helen had been waiting for, the one in which she could atone for all the nastiness with which she had been forced to treat the girl she loved. "Action!" to her was just a signal to let herself go, to be natural, to cease being the actress; and you cried and I cried because two sweet girls, the one contrite, the other forgiving, were just that—two sweet girls, not two screen actresses. In that mysterious way the motion picture camera has, it conveyed to our emotions the emotion Helen felt, the genuineness, the sincerity of it. We did not interpret the scene intellectually, did not shed tears because our brains told us to; we simply were the helpless victims of our emotions, just as the two girls were the helpless victims of theirs.

"TIME" AND SCREEN CRITICISM . . .

THE person who reviews motion pictures for Time I should take time out to study screen entertainment. No one can quarrel with him when he writes that this picture is good and that one bad, provided, of course, that he is expressing his honest opinion; but when he gives his reasons for his likes and dislikes he should base his statements on greater knowledge of the subject than he displays in his review of Jezebel (Time, March 28). "As drama, Jezebel is slender stuff," he writes. "One red dance frock in a ballroom full of white ones could not ordinarily be much of a shock to a cinemaudience." The red frock was not put in the picture to shock the audience; it was there to shock the other people in the picture, and all that the audience was supposed to get out of it was the fact of the shock it gave the other dancers. Therein lay the drama, admirably developed by brilliant direction and acting. Prior to the ballroom sequence it is planted that only white gowns are worn by respectable unmarried girls, thus the shock the red one creates is quite understandable.

WALT AND DONALD DUCK . . .

WHEN I complained to Walt Disney the other day that I could not understand anything said by Donald Duck, he told me that duck sound and words were not on good terms with one another, that if the person making the sound had to make his words distinct, the sound would not be authentic. Something to do with vocal cords. The only comfort I

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NoCuts

got out of Walt was his assertion that it was not intended that the audience should understand the duck's conversation; he makes no key speeches, so the audience loses nothing by its inability to understand him. I asked Walt if he understands the duck and he said he did.

HAYS AND FILM ADVERTISING . . .

THE annual reports which Will Hays makes always interest me. They make good reading for the public and have no effect on the industry. Each year Will says the same things in different ways, in sentences of imposing roundness in which his meaning is sometimes obscure. The Associated Press last week stripped his latest report of its verbosity and let its high spots come to the surface. Among the "gains of 'self-regulation' in the industry," this one interested me: "The maintenance of the highest possible advertising standard to make certain that pictures are properly exploited." The film industry does a number of ridiculous things, but nothing else quite as ridiculous as the manner in which it does its advertising. In no other department does it waste so much money. If pictures were half as good as the New York office exaggerators claim they are, every theatre in the country would be crowded nightly. The advertisements are prepared while the pictures are being made and before anyone can know how entertaining they will turn out to be. It is dishonest advertising; exhibitors and public alike know it to be dishonest, and yet it goes on, year after year, squandering money which the higher-ups condone because it is flattering to them. Any trade paper which constantly plays up the greatness of film barons is flooded with the industry's advertising. The Spectator gets none as it prints only the truth as it sees it.

CYCLES AND PICTURE BRAINS . . .

EVERY once in a while we read the statement of some film executive gravely declaring that this or that sort of picture is going out, that the goofy comedy cycle is waning, that the public no longer wants musicals. Just how ridiculous such opinions are becomes apparent when you consider that what they really mean is that the public will refuse to be entertained by even an entertaining picture dealing with one of the themes the executives put on the outlawed list. No picture in screen history was made successful by virtue of its theme. Its success was due to the manner of its presentation. Musical pictures are losing favor, not because they are musicals, but because each new one offered is but an imitation of all that have gone before it. What the public tires of is lack of variety. If a picture containing a cow jumping over the moon is a box-office success, we are given so many cows jumping over moons that naturally we tire of them. But that does not mean that a picture would fail if based on the same theme but, by way of variety, having a bear going over a mountain. I will grant the public can get fed up on spectacles, on purely visual scenes, but it never will get fed up on anything which appeals to its emotions or tickles its funnybone, as long as it is presented with sufficient variety to make each of its appearances look new. In any event, if there were anything to this cycle-waning idea, we would have to stop making pictures as Hollywood already has used up all the cycles there are. A good substitute for them now would be picture brains.

CHARLIE McCARTHY AND HIS BOSS . . .

DGAR BERGEN recently gave me some interest-L ing sidelights on his work. I had told him what amazed me most was the precision of his transition from one voice to another, always well defined no matter how closely each was following on the heels of the other. Edgar told me he has been at it so long he switches instinctively, without conscious thought, from one voice to another. It is the same way with Charlie McCarthy's physical movements, his manipulations being Edgar's automatic reaction to the meaning of Charlie's speeches. But things are different when Charlie has been made different. For Goldwyn Follies, for instance, the dummy's coloring had to be changed for technicolor shooting. It disturbed Edgar; it was a different Charlie he had on his knee, one with whom he was not completely familiar. The result was that Edgar got mixed in his lines at times.

HONORS WITH COMPLICATIONS...

COUPLE of years ago I wrote of a Minneapolis A girl, daughter of a Spectator subscriber, who named her dog Welford because she liked the Spectator, and wrote to ask me if I minded. Of course I replied that I felt highly complimented and would do my best to be worthy of the honor; that if she would let me know all the nice things Welford did, I would endeavor to make myself nicer by incorporating their equivalents in my human contacts. Now comes the alarming news that Welford has had pups. I certainly never counted on anything of that sort, and am somewhat bewildered. I realize I am sort of-sort of-well, grandfather of a litter of pups, and what is the proper social procedure when one finds himself in such a position? Will Grace—Grace is my secretary who types all the stuff I write in longhand at home-will she please remind me to write to Emily Post? Two of the pups, my young

The next issue of the Spectator will be Twelfth Birthday Number

Minneapolis friend tells me, are being retained by her and she has found good homes for the other four. That she still is an enthusiastic reader of the Spectator is demonstrated by her selection of names for two pups she has kept—Speck and Tator. She says her father helped her think them up.

AT HOME AND ON THE SCREEN ...

TAKE any evening some people you like drop in, gather in front of the wod fire and talk of things which interest you and them, talk in easy, conversational tones while music, perhaps, comes from a muted radio in the next room. It is pleasant, restful entertainment, its mood relaxing. Exactly the same mood could be pleasant and restful to picture audiences if presented on the screen. Recently we were dinner guests at the home of one of the big directors. The party consisted of host and hostess and eight guests; the conversation toyed with a variety of subjects and from the living room came soft music from a repeating phonograph. Afterwards we drove to a studio and viewed the director's latest picture. The scene at his home was almost duplicated in the picture, even to the detail of there being ten people seated at a dinner table. But in the picture the dinners almost shouted at one another and there was no soft music, none of the quiet conversation and low laughter which had made so pleasant the dinner at the director's home. I really can't understand why they do it.

BOX-OFFICE RECEIPTS DROPPING . . .

AN AUTHENTIC index of the rise and fall of picture box-office receipts is the amount of the admission taxes received each month by the Internal Revenue Bureau of the federal government. For December last, the latest figures made public, the receipts were the smallest for any month since May, 1936. In the same interval picture production costs rose steadily. Producers eventually will learn, what the Spectator so often has claimed, that screen entertainment cannot be made out of money. The public reacts to the emotional content of a picture, not to its cost.

COMMERCIALS AND AUDIENCES . . .

WE ARE hearing quite a lot about commercial pictures and the danger of their getting a place on theatre programs. I have not posted myself on the subject sufficiently to be aware who is objecting to what, but there seems to be some opposition to this form of entertainment as a part of regular screen fare. I do not think audiences would be opposed to it. Recently I saw a short subject showing how felt hats are made. It was most interesting, and I do not see why it would have been any less interesting or less informative if it had borne the Knox trademark—if it had shown how that firm's felt hats are made. Two or three years ago I wrote something in favor of the same thing. Everything you wear, eat or see

in your home could be the subject of an interesting short subject. Flour From the Field to the Flapjack could hold the interest of an audience if presented in an interesting manner and even if it had a Gold Medal or Globe A emblem on it. I suppose the film industry does not wish commercial firms to make pictures and give them to exhibitors without cost. What is to prevent the film industry from making deals with the firms to make the pictures, getting its profits in a lump sum from the firms and giving the exhibitors the pictures for nothing? The profit to exhibitors would be what they would save by not having to buy something to fill the spot on their screens the commercials would fill.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

REDDIE, the spaniel, has various ways of wak $m{I}$ ing me when he thinks I should get up and have our walk; this morning he sneezed. . . . I like cowboy songs. . . . The first time I met Doug Fairbanks, Jr., I helped him mount his pony; he was an interesting kid. . . . A man, draped over the side of the Brown Derby booth to which Bill, the courteous head waiter, was leading us, refused to move when Bill politely asked him to; I spoke a trifle more sharply, and you can imagine my chagrin when the man turned and I discovered he was Phil Regan. Think of my nerve—actually asking such a great actor to let us have our seats! Of course we should have waited his pleasure. . . I have my boiled eggs served in the shell. I'm pretty good at boiling them but otherwise not much of a cook. . . . To make Mabel and other Eastern readers jealous: A roadside sign I pass on the way home: "Oranges, 12 doz., 25cts.". . . . After a lapse of some years I again am in good standing as an Amos and Andy fan. . . . It is tough having to sit inside writing this stuff when outside the sun is shining, birds are singing and the garden is calling; think I'll knock off for a spell and cut some flowers for the house. . . . Flowers cut; and now in a garden chair, about midway between the sundial and the bird bath. . . . The locust trees are the last in the grounds to break out leaves. . . . Since the flood our tires have picked up nails from North Hollywood roads every day or so, a result of debris scattered by rushing water. . . . Year or so ago I began to count cribbage hands in numbers on license plates of passing cars; now I can't stop it; driving me dotty. . . . About midway between Hugh Herbert's home and ours is a narrow bridge, a cockeyed sort of thing which makes a jog in the road; for years residents have been urging its replacement by something straight and wider; it is the only bridge for miles around not carried away by the recent flood. . . . My favorite trees are the ones which shed their leaves in the fall and are dressed anew each spring. . . . They do come back; Mrs. Spectator just bought a hat exactly like the one she wore the first time I saw her, and this year we celebrate our thirtieth wedding anniversary.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

INTELLIGENTLY MADE WESTERN . . .

● THE OVERLAND EXPRESS; Columbia release of a Coronet production: directed by Drew Eberson; original screen play by Monroe Shaff: production manager. Wilbur F. McGaugh; photographed by Allen Q. Thompson; film editor. Gene Milford; art director. F. Paul Sylos; musical supervisor. Edward Kilenyi; recorded by L. John Myers; assistant director. Robert Smith. Cast: Buck Jones. Marjorie Reynolds, Carlyle Moore, Matson Williams, William Arnold, Lou Kelly, Bud Osborne, Ben Taggart.

EXCELLENT entertainment for any audience any-Lywhere; the best written and directed Western I have seen in years. This morning I am trying to persuade myself that it is not as good as I thought it was when I saw it last night, but I cannot make a go of it. The Overland Express, though its running time is under an hour and its cost was not great, comes to the screen as a Western masterpiece. It is about something—the inauguration of the Pony Express mail service from St. Louis to Sacramento. It sticks to its business; there is not a single wisecrack in it and not one attempt at a detour to make the audience laugh. The players speak to one another in the low, even tones characteristic of Western men when life on the prairies was a serious business. Over half the story is told by the camera without aid of a single spoken word. Six-shooters do not keep right on firing after they have fired six shots. There is a great deal of fast riding, and each time it is shown the audience knows where the rider or riders are going and why. It has everything in it which good Westerns contain, but no one thing which is in it solely because we expect to see it in a Western. In Overland Express it means something. The picture scorns all conventions. The boy in the romance is killed because the story demands it.

Buck Jones, Stalwart Star . . .

THE star receives no more attention from the story or from the direction than any of the other principal players. Buck Jones, handsome, stalwart, dominates the picture by the force of his personality and not with the help of the camera. He is the man who conceives the Pony Express and who carries it through against terrific odds. Not for years has the screen shown us a better example of pure cinema than is revealed in the treatment of a sequence showing the creation of the route across the continent, and one showing the inauguration of the mail service. In neither is there any dialogue; the camera is the sole story-telling medium. When Buck Jones, astride his beautiful white horse, dashes out of Sacramento one morning, carrying the mail to the first relay station, you will sit up in your seat and stay that way until he dashes back to Sacramento with the pouch which started from the East when he started from the West and which we see, at each relay, passed into the hands of an already-mounted rider whose pony is underway the instant he gets it. The superb riding, its significance, the masterly direction, the expert film editing, combine to make the sequence an outstanding example of pure motion picture art. Thrilling? I should say so! Every time the mail pouch was passed I wanted to stand up and cheer.

Clever Script, Good Music . . .

MONROE SHAFF'S script is an example of screen writing at its best. It provides for a parade of action scenes broken only at well spaced intervals by essential and brief scenes which keep us abreast of the story and in none of which is a superfluous word spoken. The mail-coach people who supply the conflict by trying to wreck the plans of Jones and his backers, do not waste words. "We must get busy," says their leader, and thereafter the camera picks up the story and shows us every step taken to checkmate Jones and does not ask us to listen to another word. We see everything; hear only the sounds incidental to what is being done. Subconsciously we hear music. The score provided by Edward Kilenyi is a big feature of the production. It stays where it belongs—in the background. At the moment of writing I do not know if it is continuous, but whenever I took time out as audience and became a reviewer I was aware of it, particularly in the riding sequences in which the tempo of the music matched that of the hoofbeats of the galloping horses—picture scoring at its best. I was aware of it also in some dialogue scenes. When Hollywood grows up, when it develops a fully matured picture brain, all pictures will have continuous scores; but meanwhile we could do with a few more musicians like Kilenyi, and a few more producers like I G. Leonard with sense enough to realize music's proper place in motion picture entertainment.

Eberson's Direction Clever . . .

CCRIPT, music, cast, contributed potentialities which are realized to the full by the understanding direction of Drew Eberson. This is the first time I have seen any of his work. He puts into his direction just about everything the Spectator has contended should be in it. A feature of Overland Express is its total lack of obvious effort to impress us. Apparently Eberson subscribes to the universal law that the creator of an art object should think only in terms of the object, not of the person or persons for whom it is being created. Eberson takes us into the midst of his picture to permit us to see what is going on, but he wastes no time in trying to attract our attention to his own cleverness. Overland Express has that most intelligent direction a picture can have—the kind which does not remind us that a director was anywhere around when it was shot. This picture easily could have become just another of the noisy, illogical little Westerns which are ground out rapidly to meet the demands of non-critical audiences; but under Eberson's direction it becomes a little action gem with everything to satisfy the most critical audience and without being above the heads of those who cannot recognize applied screen art. Those who can appreciate intelligent film editing will find Overland Express a delight. It is the work of Gene Milford, Academy Award winner for his editing of Lost Horizon. If you would know what constitutes the best in assembling film, see this little picture, particularly the sequence in which the mail pouches fairly fly ahorseback across the plains. It is beautiful work.

Buck's Popularity Well Founded . . .

ONE easily can understand why Buck Jones has so many million admirers. This picture affords me only my second glimpse of him, but I am numbered among the millions. Buck is something bigger than an actor; he is a person. Although he lives just two turns in the road from where we live, I never have seen him off the screen, but when I carry out my long deferred resolution to toddle over to his ranch and meet him, his horses and dogs, I expect to find only the Buck I already know, a likable fellow, clean, a square shooter with enough gumption to know that the first rule of acting is not to act. There are two young people with him in this picture who will bear watching by talent scouts. Marjorie Reynolds is a nice looking youngster endowed with a personality which will take her places if she gets half a chance. She will supply the other half. Carlyle Moore, a good looking youth, also is the possessor of a pleasing personality and ability to make the most of it. I think all he needs is the Big Chance. . . Reading over what I have written thus far, I find I have overlooked a most important contribution to the picture—the excellent photography of Allen Thompson. Some of his shots possess great beauty and all of them are of high artistic merit.

ONE FOR WITHERS FANS . . .

 RASCALS; 20th-Fox production and release; directed by H. Bruce Humberstone; associate producer, John Stone; original screen play, Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; music and lyrics by Sidney Clare and Harry Akst; dances staged by Nick Castle; photography, Edward Cronjager; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Haldane Douglas; film editor, Jack Murray: costumes, Helen A. Myron: musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jane Withers, Rochelle Hudson, Robert Wilcox, Borrah Minevitch and Gang, Steffi Duna, Katharine Alexander, Chester Clute, Jose Crespo, Paul Stanton, Frank Reicher, Edward Cooper, Kathleen Burke, Myra Marsh, Frank Puglia, Robert Gleckler, Edward Dunn, Howard Hickman.

DESPITE her proud position among the Big Ten of box-office honors, Jane Withers' pictures appealed to me so little that I have been assigning them to other reviewers as I was afraid I could not do them justice; but when the preview of Rascals was announced I determined to see it myself, to take it apart and see if I could find out why little Jane is such a box-office magnet. Century wisely staged the showing on Friday night in a neighborhood house, a week-night when a large audience of children could be counted on. Rascals went over with a bang, the younger element of the audience expressing its approval in whistles, cheers and joyous laughter. Thus the picture accomplished the purpose for which it was made. It was not made for you or me. We can enjoy Shirley Temple, for she is a child apart, a rare personality with extraordinary gifts. But Jane is for children; she is one of them, one of the sort you can find wherever you go, and in her each child can see

herself or himself more readily than in the case of Shirley. Not so beautiful that other girls envy her, permitted on the screen to realize the suppressed desires of the children in the audience, her screen appearances give them vicarious enjoyment they can get from no other star, big or little, male or female.

Directors with Eye on Market . . .

WISELY has Bruce Humberstone directed Rascals to please the tremendous audience Jane has won. Where plausibility or logic might get in the way of good fun, he gives fun the go signal and lets plausibility and logic duck for cover and stay there until they are wanted again-not that he is called upon very often to perform the trick, for most of the things Jane does are just what we would expect such a lively, optimistic, and audacious youngster to do. Of course, she meets emergencies with a resourcefulness we might expect only an adult to display, but Withers fans are not going to be disturbed by a little thing like that. In any event, some probability is lent the improbabilities by the casting of Jane as a member of a band of gypsies, and gypsy children develope rapidly. At that, though, a little more credibility might have been displayed in some of the sequences. The final fade-out is of a couple being married without having attended to the detail of securing a license. The best direction cannot compensate for a script of that sort.

Has Engaging Music . . .

ONE feature of the picture which will appeal to adult audiences is the music of the Minevitch Gang. Their harmonica playing always get me, even in spite of Minevitch's efforts to ruin its effect by his insistence upon having his crazy antics occupying the center of the stage even when a selection of musical value is being played. In Rascals Minevitch plays his first character role of importance, going all the way through the picture as Jane's chief lieutenant. Humberstone directs him in a way that will make his performance delight the youngsters and make adults laugh even though they will have a hard time believing some of it could happen. The whole picture, however, is sketched in broad strokes, elemental stuff, but, as I have said—squarely hitting the target aimed at. What more could you expect from any director? The picture is well mounted, showing us many interesting shots of gypsy camps. Also there is some first class ensemble singing by the gypsies.

GREAT SCREEN MUSICAL . . .

• THE LIFE AND LOVES OF BEETHOVEN; direction and scenario, Abel Gance: dialogue, Steve Passeur: cameras, Robert Lefebvre and Marc Fossard; settings, Jacques Colombier; editor, Marguerite Beague; sound, Philippe Gaubert; music by Orchestra de la Societe des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris, under the direction of Louis Masson. Cast: Harry Baur, Annie Ducaux, Jany Holt, Pauley, Debucourt, Lucien Rozenberg, Yolande Lafon, Lucas Gridoux.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

THIS review is advisedly captioned "The Great I Screen Musical." The term "screen musical, usually implies dancing girls, bleating, cacophonous swing

and a finale as super-gigantic as anything Busby Berkeley could design. The use of music in the production of pictures so frequently has been implied unwisely that the present offering, Life and Loves of Beethoven, is something startlingly new, an innovation, if you please. Yet there is nothing really unusual. The story of a great master of music has been preserved on celluloid. And because of the availability of sound his music has been added. Dr. Bruno Ussher has already commented at length on the music itself, in the last issue. I am not qualified to discuss the music and the arrangements used in the picture. But this much I feel I am equipped to say: I have never seen music woven into a story with so little sense of protrusion as in the present instance. As much as I enjoyed Mad About Music and 100 Men and a Girl, I feel that by comparison the musical interpolations seemed almost out of place. In Beethoven the music becomes an integral part of the plot. It not only establishes a mood, but it carries the story along, and mirrors the emotions of the actors.

Cinematic License . . .

POETIC license is reported to make impossible events or ideas palatable. Cinematic license is the screen counterpart of such permission. Unquestionably Director Abel Gance took liberties with Beethoven's life, made numerous anachronistic errors. And yet these mistakes seem unimportant in the light of the final accomplishment. What the director strove to obtain was a characterization, a human view of Beethoven. The picture has been scored in other parts because of a certain amount of fictionization. It is hardly neccesary to comment at length on hair-splitting of this type. Harry Baur enacted the role of the Austrian composer. His creation became a breathing, dynamic thing, as real as the actor himself. I have seen Mr. Baur as the Inspector in Crime and Punishment and as a Russian profiteer in I Stand Condemned, and yet not for a moment did I remember him as anyone except Beethoven. He is assigned a minimum of lines, and yet when he plays two of his compositions at the piano at various times during the course of the picture, the spectator can read his very thoughts. That portion of the story in which Beethoven goes deaf are tellingly told without the aid of a single line of dialogue.

Vienna of 1801 . . .

BEETHOVEN is a period picture and the flavor of Vienna during the early Napoleonic era is well captured. It is noteworthy that this result has been obtained without the use of expensive and expansive sets. Except for a large theatre gathering at which the Emperor of Austria is present there is no monumental shot. And yet the picture does not lack in screen values. Beethoven is big. And mostly through the dynamics of Baur's performance. Added to his characterization is the work of Annie Ducaux as Therese von Brunswick, the woman who loves Beethoven but whose love is unanswered. And through the performance of Jany Holt as Juliette Guicciardi, later Count-

ess Gallenberg. There are other individual performances, touches here and there that breathe the spirit of the times. Vienna of that period is thoroughly captured.

Cutting, Camera Outstanding . . .

BEETHOVEN could not have been an easy picture to edit. Because of the pattern of to edit. Because of the nature of the picture itself there is little action. Dramatic intensity is obtained through sensible cutting. This the film editor does well. I was especially impressed with his deft handling of that sequence in which Beethoven realizes his deafness. In desperation and in futility he pounds his head and then returns to his piano to mock the thunderclaps that he cannot hear, but which he senses. The editing during his rendition of phrases of the Pastoral Symphony are masterful. The camera takes us to splitting lightning with each thunder of the music; to his deep, tragic eyes with each penetrating passage; to the sun-swept skies when the story is over and the music is low and haunting. The cutting at the death scene is another portion of the film that particularly appealed to me, with its background of the Moonlight Sonata. The camera effects obtained by Cameramen Robert Lefebvre and Marc Fossard, especially during the death scenes, were magnificent. Beethoven's face, alive with intensity, pain, remorse, hate, love, and that ever-present feeling of futility melts gently into a death mask, almost devoid of all

Marriage of Music and Film . . .

Hollywood Spectator

TO MY mind Beethoven represents the first real marriage of music and celluloid, and is for that reason an outstanding film. For those who appreciate fine pictures this one will be sure to please. For those who seek new progress in screen technology, I believe that the camera work has much to commend it. And Beethoven is not a picture that should be relegated simply to "art" houses and "foreign" theatres. It is not important that the spectators do not understand French. The subtitles are more than adequate. And they might even be dispensed with at that. Beethoven is a

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film that moves because of the imagination of the spectator, and not because of plot manipulations by the scenario writer.

STORY GOES BESERK ...

● LITTLE MISS ROUGHNECK: Columbia picture and release; story by Fred Niblo, Jr., screen play by Fred Niblo, Jr., Grace Neville and Michael Simmons; directed by Aubrey Scotto; photographed by Benjamin Kline; film editor, James Sweeney; assistant director, Bob Farfan; sound by George Cooper; ard direction by Stephen Goosson; gowns by Kalloch; music by Ben Oakland; lyrics by Milton Drake; musical direction by Morris Stoloff; associate producer, Wallace MacDonald. Cast: Edith Fellows, Leo Carrillo, Scott Colton, Jacqueline Wells, Margaret Irving, Inez Palange, George McKay, Thurston Hall, Frank C. Wilson, John Gallaudet, Walter Stahl, Ivan Miller, Al Bridge, Wade Boteler, Guy Usher.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

FEO CARRILLO'S shining personality and Edith Le Fellows' surprise emergence as a singer of note combine to make Little Miss Roughneck a good picture. I have never seen Carrillo in better form, and I believe that his current portrayal is one of the best to date. Ever since She Married Her Boss Edith Fellows has been waiting for a starring vehicle. This is her stellar debut and she holds up magnificently under it. She plays the spoiled brat of a vaudeville family to perfection. Anyone in the audience would have considered it a privilege to give the young lady a thorough going over with the family hairbrush, so convincing was her performance. Relating the story of a talented kid genius and a scheming mother who try to crash Hollywood, Roughneck starts out to be a pretty good picture about Hollywood. Agent Scott Colton tries to get Edith into the movies to satisfy the longings of her ambitious mama, Margaret Irving. But he does so only because he likes older daughter Jacqueline Wells.

Singing Is Outstanding . . .

THE trio and their agent land in Hollywood. Begins the long uphill fight for recognition. But ma spoils everything, as some Hollywood mothers are wont to do, and older daughter decides to pack the family off for home. Edith realizes a big publicity scoop by running away, lands agent and ma in jail as the perpetrators of a hoax. She lives with Mexican Leo Carrillo and wife Inez Palange and four kids, a goat and a dog. Thus begins Edith's regeneration. The young starlet is given ample opportunity to display her talents and gives some fine rendi-



tions of classical music. Her Rigoletto is quite well sung. Her duet of La Golondrina with Leo Carrillo is one of the finest things I have seen and heard for a long time. It is Dr. Bruno Ussher's province to discuss the music of current pictures, but without knowing too much about it, I venture to guess that Miss Fellows strained her voice quite a bit for the Rigoletto offering. She has a fine voice, one that should not burn itself out for the sake of show. La Golondrina, which seems to have much less taxing on the vocal chords, was equally, if not more, impressive.

Who Is This Pepe Kid? . . .

OME, come credit-sheet makers, who is Pepe, that dirty-faced little brat who just about hauled the picture away with his smile? He had a bit of a role as one of Leo Carrillo's brood. The kid's naturalness and wistfulness captivated me and seemed to garner the biggest laughs of the picture. Jacqueline Wells gave more than a pedestrian performance as the older daughter. The rapidity of plot action in the last two reels gave her little opportunity to display anything, but she was outstanding in her simple role. Margaret Irving, prototype of Hollywood mothers, is an object lesson. Walter Stahl, as Director Von Hemmer, was a fine cameo of Cecil B. de Mille and Von Stroheim rolled into one. Inez Palange was excellent as the level-headed member of the Carrillo clan. The cast was generally excellent and Director Aubrey Scotto made this minor budget picture into a major effort. But he and the rest of the cast were hampered with an unfortunate story.

Story Rattles Loose . . .

ITTLE MISS ROUGHNECK almost ended as one of the finest juvenile comedies of the year. The combination of Edith Fellows and Leo Carrillo, and Pepe and his two older brothers, permitted a real opportunity for a swell kid picture. There was a wistful charm about it that made me think Director Aubrey Scotto knew how kids should act and did not insist on any artificial dramatics or emotions. However, Screen Writers Fred Niblo, Jr., Grace Neville and Michael Simmons let the story run away with itself. After Edith's disappearance from home, she hides with Carrillo. She urges him to mail a letter in town. This he does and is spotted by the postmaster as the Foxine Larue kidnapper. Begins another Fury, and not done one-tenth as well. The final episodes in the picture, the lynch-fury mob, the last minute race for time to save imprisoned Carrillo, the false heroics on the part of Edith seemed as out of place as a seal in your living room. The writers had a fine story in the regeneration of a Broadway brat into a human being, but under present circumstances the change in her character was not convincing. I was not certain that after her final rendition of Rigoletto, in which she was appearing before the camera, she was not going off into a corner for a good temperamental tantrum. I was disappointed that the tail-end should have wagged the dog to a loose finale. Evident care was taken by Cameraman Benjamin Kline in his photography. His running-brook exteriors were particularly well executed, as was the early morning runaway of Edith in the railroad yards. I thought the staging of the Rigoletto offering well done, and the sets lavish without being ornate. A laurel to Stephen Goosson for his Mexican hacienda interiors, the essence of sans souci Mexican living. Kalloch has given Jacqueline Wells and Margaret Irving some believable clothes—and hats. And Film Editor James Sweeney did an excellent job of cutting. I thought his mob scene editing worthier of a better effort.

AUDIBLE ENEMY ...

● INVISIBLE ENEMY: Republic picture and release; associate producer and director, John H. Auer; screen play by Albert J. Cohen, Alex Gottleib, Norman Burnstine; original story by Albert J. Cohen and Robert T. Shannon: production manager, Al Wilson: photographer, Jack Marta; supervising editor; Murray Seldeen; film editor. William Morgan; art director, John Victor Mackay; musical direction by Alberto Colombo; costumes by Irene Saltern. Cast: Alan Marshal, Tala Birell, Mady Correll, C. Henry Gordon, Herbert Mundin, Gerald Oliver Smith, Ivan Simpson, Elsa Buchanan, Dwight Frye, Leonard Willey, Ian MacLaren, Egon Brecher.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

ALTHOUGH the plot of Invisible Enemy tells me that C. Henry Gordon, as the international banker, Kamarov, is the villain of this piece, I have some different ideas on the subject. The heavy on hand is none other than the Forum Theatre projectionist who turned on the sound juice so loud I was bounced out of my seat every time one of the actors spoke a line. Editor Beaton has pointed out that discomfiture has a lot to do with the attitude of the reviewer. This may seem unfair in a way, but if the reviewer is invited to enjoy the picture, then it should be made enjoyable for him. Naturally, this has nothing to do with the making, writing, producing and directing of the picture itself. But more often than not it has made a good picture into an unsittable one.

Republic Has Courage...

INVISIBLE ENEMY for all its plot cliches and for all its faint aroma of Bulldog Drummond, has the virtue of being a picture with something to say. It is the only quasi-anti-war picture that has emanated from Hollywood in some time. A little odd that the leading headlines of the moment should yield such little material for picture making. Invisible Enemy concerns the efforts of young Jeffrey Clavering to expose and break a meeting of some international bankers who profit by war and oil. Add to the mixture a ruthless leader, a girl, a chateau set off the main road, an electrical gadget that does people in and you have all of it. The story moves along jerkily at times and seems to rely unfortunately on too many stock situations. I looked for and missed a certain plot freshness that would have helped.

Direction Is Good ...

DIRECTOR JOHN H. AUER squeezed every bit of good out of this rather tired plot and succeeded in giving the narrative a good amount of hum. The story opens in a London mission and moves to

the office of an oil syndicate—and from there to the Paris chateau of the banker-villain. There is much switching off lights and shots in the dark which seemed out of place. There was one line that stood out like a sore thumb. One of the oil syndicate members, titled Sir Joshua, hearing a knock at the door and expecting Jeffrey Clavering, observed: "It must be him." Now noticing grammatical errors is a rather picayune sort of way of reviewing a picture-but that is no excuse for a mistake of this kind. Multiply that error by a hundred—or a thousand—similar small ones and the result is a bad picture. The story has been given good production values and the Parisian atmosphere is well captured. This is due in no small measure to the efforts of Art Director John Victor Mackay who designed some good sets.

Cast Is Beyond Script...

ALAN MARSHALL is excellent as the dashing Britisher who flies into the teeth of danger. His makeup was spotty, which means that his scenes rarely matched. On one line he needed a shave—on the next he was clean-shaken, an error that should not have been missed. Tala Birell is still one of the best language actresses in Hollywood who doesn't seem to get the kind of roles she deserves. Her stint in Republic's musical, Manhattan Merry Go Round, established her as a very fine comedienne. Her current part allows her little opportunity. Mady Correll is an engaging young actress who knows that acting constitutes more than grimacing before the camera. This is the first time I have seen her on the screen and I believe I shall remember her if I see her again. She stood out in a part as the other love. C. Henry Gordon, one of my favorite heavies, scores again. It took so long for Alan Marshall to do him in that I felt like doing it long before. That is how convincing his performance was. Herbert Mundin is one of Hollywood's finest character actors. Typing has unfortunately relegated him to the eternal Hollywood realm of butlerdom. His performance in Calvalcade exhibited his dramatic talents. He is a good comedian and a good straight player. And that takes in more than butling. The same goes for Ivan Simpson who has butled for so long that we forget him as anything

WE WANT JESSIE . . .

• SAILING ALONG; Gaumont-British; director, Sonnie Hale; story, Selwyn Jepson; adaptation and dialogue, Lesser Samuels; screen play, Sonnie Hale; music director, Louis Levy; photographer, Glenn MacWilliams. Cast: Jessie Matthews, Roland Young, Barry Mackay, Jack Whiting, Noel Madison, Alatair Sim, Athene Seyler, Frank Pettingell, Margaret Vyner, Peggy Novak, William Dewhurst.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

JUST as we hear about the sudden English production slump and the pitfalls and dilemma of the present Quota Act situation whereby English producers will produce less and import less, Gaumont-British comes along with something as lavish and as tuneful as any of the best of American musicals.

There is nothing small about Sailing Along, Jessie Matthews' latest dancing-singing picture, for some of the sets rival the work of a Cedric Gibbons or a Jack Otterson. But there is more than furniture and settings to see. There is a good robust comedy, and Jessie's dancing, still tops among the ladies for my money. Now and anon there are rumors and stories that Jessie Matthews will be teamed with Fred Astaire. I can think of no happier union. Several years ago when MGM was negotiating for several Matthews pictures and it seemed as if the young lady were about to come to these shores, she appeared in several very bad musicals that soured her with the American public. Sailing Along is the best thing she's done since Evergreen. It seems that her producers gave her a minimum of dancing and a maximum of histrionics.

Lots of Good Dancing . . .

WHAT she needed then, and what she exhibits in the present offering, is dancing and lots of it. The dancing is late in coming, but all of it is good. It is not important to comment about the story and the screen play, for that portion of the production is not intended to be important. The music is excellent. Somehow these Britishers succeed in giving their songs good, crisp words, and it is a relief to find that the "you-true-and blue" lines are not present. Jack Whiting, her dancing and singing partner, is an excellent dancer and has a most pleasing voice. His songs were put across without any leather-lunging. His dancing was nimble and light-footed. He looked impressive with Jessie Matthews, which, I believe, is saying something.

Cast Is Good . . .

ROLAND YOUNG, as the discoverer of geniuses, stands out in a part which he breezes through. I have never seen an actor give so much of a dramatic performance with so little effort. His current assignment calls for little enough. But even there his characterization has a brittle and sparkling sort of humor. And, fortunately, not too British. Alatair Sim as Sylvester, the surrealist painter, gave a fine characterization, and carried off most of the laughing honors. There is gentle jibing at art in general, especially in that sequence in which the painter apologizes for having executed anything as banal as a cow leaning up against an oak. Our own Noel Madison, as Script will say of him, takes leave of gangster roles and enacts the part of Windy, American press agent. His characterization is much too broad, and any press agent who acted that way in this country would get his face pushed in. But then we Americans are part heathen, part Mohican, part Neanderthal, and our British cousins expect a certain amount of brashness. As a matter of fact, in all the English pictures I have ever seen the American is always the loud-mouth. I believe our English characterizations are a little fairer than that.

Film Needs Cutting . . .

AS IT stands Sailing Along needs cutting. Although the dancing and singing more than make up for the lack of plot movement, the spectator will will-

ingly sit through so much entertainment before he starts to squirm. I refer specifically to the two renditions of The River, the Thames variety of a Swanee lullaby. When Your Heart Skips a Beat and Runs Away is a very tuneful number but is repeated in its entirety some three times at three different intervals in the story before the picture is over. The same is true of My Souvenir of Love, another singy ditty that has good lyrics. I had the feeling, too, that the editing was a little jagged. Especially in those sequences that ended in fadeouts. Lines of dialogue and even bits of action were suddenly halted with the arrival of a black blotch. I liked Barry Mackay as the reasonably tolerant young man at the end. In the beginning he was a little too swaggerlingly cruel, and therefore, for a romantic lead, a little unbelievable.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD MABEL KEEFER

AVING said and written, times without number, H that screen musical backgrounds should be sensed, not consciously heard, I read with keen interest an article in the New York Herald Tribune, about Boris Morros, musical director at Paramount. Mr. Morros is quoted as saying: "Picture and music must both be fine. They must truly blend. Here is the secret: music in a picture should be felt, not heard."

WONDER how that phrase having to do with heaping coals of fire on once had ing coals of fire on one's head originated, and why such an act is supposed to be a sort of doing good for evil. If it is all the same to any one who may feel inclined to heap coals of fire on my head for some sineither of ommission or commisssion—I would rather he or she would put the unlighted coal in my coal bin. Which, of course, has nothing to do with the cinema.

RADIO commentator has just mentioned the fact A that this year marks the one hundredth anniversary of peace on the Canadian border, and he is saying that there should be a celebration of some sort. Producers, schools and colleges please refer to the Spectator of January 29, 1938, and my plan for calling the attention of the world to the unarmed Canadian frontier.

NOTICING the rather slurring references to "church members" and "club women" as the interest members" and "club women" as the instigators of the repercussions and reverberations after the Mae West broadcast on the Chase & Sanborn hour, I marvel that none of these comments takes into consideration the fact that one might object to that sort of thing merely as a matter of good taste, entirely independent of religious scruples, or that one even

might be unutterably bored by it. There are any number of people in the world who find cheapness uninteresting.

FUNNY, isn't it, that people who wear those exasperating perpetual smiles on their lips never have a smile in their eyes. (I mean "queer" funny, not "ha, ha," funny.)

MAGIC LANTERN: There is a charm in those two words—even the word lantern, alone, makes us think of a soft yet guiding light. After all, in a manner of speaking, motion pictures are glorified magic lantern slides—too much glorified, perhaps, so that their light is in danger of becoming hard and brittle, and the magic of the screen destroyed. At least something makes us long intensely for the soft, heartwarming light of the lantern. True, there were smoky, dirty lanterns in the days when they were in common use, but that was not the fault of the lanterns. So, too, with our glorified magic lantern slides. If they fail to give us a cheery, guiding light, it is not the fault of the screen.

HAVE been advising those of my friends who did not see A Yank At Oxford to be sure to see it if it is brought back for a return engagement. It left me with that good-for-the-box-office feeling—the feeling of having had a thoroughly good time, and so said many others in this town.

THE publisher of our daily newspaper, the Amster-I dam Evening Recorder, writing from Africa where he is hunting big game, tells of seeing a herd of dikdiks. He says: "This cute little animal looked to us like a minature deer and is so tiny that you could carry one under your arm—that is if you could catch him." He also tells of seeing a troupe of ten baboons which must be something to see, but if it were a question of pets I think I would rather have a dikdik. But, because of my fondness for Leo MGM, I got my biggest thrill from this: "In the road ahead of us our lights revealed a large animal, and as we got close we saw that it was a big lion. He slowly stepped off the road into the bushes just as we passed within a few feet of him. He seemed to pay no attention to us. He was on the hunt for his evening meal."

A SENSE of humor is, after all, only a sense of proportion: the ability to see a thing in the light of its true value, and that is what makes its cultivation so tremendously important. The screen can do much along this line by giving us stories with characters who possess this quality of balance. The world never needed it more than it does right now.

LOVE SONG: would you know what love is like? Then of love I'll sing! No ones knows when love will strike, or when it will take wing. Ah—love is like a rainbow colored flame; like a sunset in the

West. Love is like a green ocean wave, with the sun sparkling on its crest. Love is like an army of knights of old, riding with banners unfurled; love is like a song, sounding over the rim of the world.

I'LL be a spinster if I must, I'll be an old maid—not too sour, I trust; but odds bodkins, gadzooks! Now listen to me—a maiden lady I will not be!

READING that Annabella's real name is Suzanne, I am wondering why the change? To me, Suzanne is piquant, while Annabella is heavy—stolid.

THERE is a story told of a grocer in the Italian town of Busseto, who had as an errand boy one Giuseppe Verdi, destined to become immortal as the composer of Rigoletto, Il Trovatore, La Traviata and Aida. This grocer had many musicians among his customers and he would say to Giuseppe: "You can trust a first violin, and a 'cello usually pays, but never say yes to a trombone nor an oboe; and as for a kettledrum, I wouldn't believe one on a stack of Bibles!" That was many years ago and I am sure that now all musicians are to be trusted, otherwise I should be very sad, because, along with my weakness for drums, I have a great fondness for the oboe.

ELBERT HUBBARD said: "Art is not a thing separate and apart—art is only the beautiful way of doing things." That would seem to be distinctly applicable to screen art.

WALT DISNEY bored by night clubs: I made that note after reading a short article about Mr. Disney. Of course he would be! Why should anyone with his creative ability be interested in night clubs? If someone would write an article about the thousands of motion picture patrons who are bored with night club scenes on the screen, although perhaps it will not be necessary now. Either there are fewer pictures showing night clubs or it just happens that I do not see them. There was a time, however, when even the best pictures had at least one such scene tossed in for no legitimate reason.

WONDER why the word sophisticate irritates me so? Whenever I see it or hear it I bristle all over, and am afraid to look in a mirror for fear that I may look as I feel, and the mirror will show a porcupine looking back at me.

SOMETHING to ponder over: A young man registering exasperation because he had wasted his time on Sally, Irene and Mary, thereby missing an opportunity to see The River, which was being shown at another theatre.

OF ALL sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: I'm broke again! Though I fail to accept the fact with good grace, after all, it does help to fill this space.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

Minus Benefit of Orchestra . . .

LWAYS it will be difficult to balance the make-A believe of cinema with a modicum of realism. And yet an attempt in that direction is advisable in the case of a majority of stories because most of them are borrowed from a world of reality. Hokum is one thing. Thoughtfully taken license is another and a much better method. That is why comedy, when travelling the middle of the road of life, appeals doubly. It is not the kind of art which "improves upon life." That solemn purpose is gleefully forgotten by showing-up life. There are still persons of authority in matters musical who wish to gild the lily. They cannot leave a good tune alone, but give it an orchestral build-up which detracts from the dramatic and music-realistic values of the song. Now and then composers, directors, producers are wise enough to forget there is an orchestra under contract. I refer to the Song of Legionaires in The Battle of Broadway. It is a rattling good marching song, well sung without accompaniment, whenever the boys march across the screen. Sidney Clare and Harry Akst have written a yet more amusing and catchy tune for the same 20th Century-Fox production. Their poignant ballad, I Am the Daughter of Mademoiselle, has inherited the charms of the gay and coquettish Mamselle from Armentieres. lyrics, too, have a sparkle of their own. Orchestration is light as it should be. Both songs have verve, and say all that is dramatically sufficient, and say it with brevity. Congratulations!

History and Atmosphere . . .

CPEAKING of coronation music, Collins and his musical director, Muir Mathieson, beautifully and potently underlined with music the scenes depicting the crowning of the Queen in Westminster Abbey. I can not hazard a guess whether this grand edifice was actually used for the shooting of this Imperator Film Company-made production. The choice and calibre of organ and choir music are first-rate, the heraldic fanfares interspering the ceremony authentic. They recalled what American listeners only could gather via the radio during the investiture of the present English ruler. L. E. Overtone, in charge of sound recording, assuredly produced effects conveying spaciousness as well as loftiness of location and moment. There were splendid crescendo effects. Delightful and touching use is made of classic and original music. Victoria for instance, sings Mendelssohn like a queen, but not at all like a queen of song.

Melody Enhancing Continuity . . .

COLLINS does a splendid job as he leads from an intimate love theme into music at some courtly or public function. In the same manner he expands music of grave soliloquy, when the lone queen-widow is shown mourning, into a related musical mood of

broader dramatic aspect. Recordings of widely different type are well carried out, such as, for instance, the clarity and timbre of the bagpipes in the Scottish intermezzo. Chamber music creates a subdued atmosphere, as moving as the expression of the two sovereigns who draw close to each other after they have just escaped assassination. By contrast I would point to Collins' excellently written sequence leading up to and accompanying this murderous attempt, with music of repressed, inwardly mounting violence. At no time is the pace or momentum of action exceeded by the motion and dynamics of the music. Last, but not least, one hears some very good playing from the London Symphony which recorded the score, such as during the opening in Handel's Water Music.

Long Live the Queen ...

BIOGRAPHY is a special province of the pictures. A picture such as The Life of Emile Zola constitutes a document of lasting value. That should be true also from the box-office angle. Life is the best story-writer and, as in this case, factual fidelity enhances the fascination of the story. The danger is that the playwright and director may at times rely too much on the nimbus of a name and give a side view, instead of a fullface close-up. That was done in the French film called the Life and Loves of Beethoven. From a musical standpoint the Zola film provides a more interesting field, while the pitfalls of compilation or adaptation are great in a Beethoven screen play. Max Steiner wrote a singularly subtle and telling score for the Warner Brothers Zola film. Now I have seen Victoria the Great for which Anthony Collins wrote and arranged the score. It is a wisely chosen score, borrowing occasionally a Mendelssohn song, although I must add that Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance march was not written, as the picture would imply, when the Queen celebrated her Diamond Jubilee. This fine march was composed for the coronation of Edward VII, but this is no grave offense to history.

Concerts of Film Scores . . .

SOMEONE made the suggestion the other day that concert programs, consisting of film music, be given. I believe I may claim to have been the first here to have facilitated such an effort, while in charge of Federal Music Projects in the West. Of course, chief credit must go to Bernard Kaun, who conducted. Kaun, by the way, has contributed, incognito, as it were, to many a successful film score. That concert, of which a good part, was devoted to Hollywood film music, took place about two years ago. Several Eastern project orchestras then followed the Los Angeles example. On the whole, there has not been written much film music which could stand by itself, prove self-sufficient apart from the screen. Film music as yet is rather episodic, and while the shortness of

episodes in itself would not necessarily prove a musical weakness, this kaleidoscopic music would often lack inner continuity without the screen. Film music is rarely written in the symphonic manner in which Wagner linked and re-employed his melodies. London recently heard a film music concert. Scores played were by Arthur Bliss, Walter Leigh, Miklos Rossa and Arthur Benjamin. None of the films from which the music was called have been shown in this country to any extent. All of the composers are prominent in England. Comments Ernest Newman, the eminent London critic: "The best film music is obviously going to be music born of the technique of the film and unthinkable apart from it. . . . There would be an immense future for films plus music as a new art form if the people concerned could see it."

Regulating Sound Volume . . .

FROM New York City comes a story, rather well authenticated, that Jan Kiepura went to the theatre where one of his singing-films was being shown, and demonstrated to the operator that tone-volume is a thing of subtle power. The report continues that the Polish tenor was not concerned so much with stepping-up his own arias, but to achieve beautiful, well-balanced sound. Needless to say, many a picture has been spoiled considerably in preview and public performances by undue loudness. There are exhibitors who believe that audiences come to be cheered and that high tone volume is a means of cheering some. I do not know what action sound departments take upon releasing a film to the nation and the worldwide army of operators who, shut off in their booths at the rear of an auditorium, can hardly tell the reaction of the public. I doubt, too, if they can gauge the sound effect in a full house. A sound-film operator occupies somewhat the position of an orchestra director. There is not a good conductor who does not step down from the platform and listen to his players from the rear of the hall. Of course, he has to use his experience and judge the sound on the supposition that the house is full. Film reproduction operators, too, must use their imagination, but their task is easier, in that they have many opportunities for listening in the presence of a full house. If I were an exhibitor I would insist on his doing so. If I were a producer, or a director, I would send out certain instructions to operators with every film.

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THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

ANOTHER VOGUE MAY COME . . .

 $oldsymbol{0}^{NE}$ of these days an enterprising exhibitor is going to conceive the idea of assuring his patrons a fully enjoyable evening by providing other than cinematic means of entertainment, to which they can resort during the unreeling of the appended boresome B's. He will install ping-pong tables and map out badminton courts for the young people, set up card tables for the elderly or inert, and bring out some tiddledywinks for the kiddies. And a new vogue will have been started, one that might up box-office receipts considerably. Time was when an exhibitor felt obliged at least to pretend his program was worth sitting through, whether he actually believed it or not himself. But now that the dual bill issue has come to a head and most of the public is fully aware the added feature is usually shoddy, why shouldn't the exhibitor capitalize on the controversy, make a clean breast of his predicament, appeal to his patrons' sense of humor, and provide them with surer means of entertainment during the dull portions of his filmic fare? *

NEW CYCLE WOULD BE WELCOME . . .

NE of the few pictures yet produced which have O delved into the human mind and soul, telling us something about what people are rather than merely what they do, is Jezebel. Considering that motion picture producers are so cycle-minded, it is to be hoped that the evident box-office success of this film will usher in a series of psychological dramas, for the telling of which the searching nature of the camera is so admirably suited. Such a cycle would mark a further step in the cinema's coming of age. Psychological novels and plays have been brought to the screen before, but so frequently in the transcription and direction they have been shorn of most of the significant commentary on the characters, originally the most distinguishing element of the works. Jezebel is penetrating.

Characters Must Be Revealed . . .

NOT that Owen Davis' play is about too much of anything; but William Wyler has directed it as though it were, and Bette Davis and others have played it as though it were. Whether the central character will hold water is a matter of some doubt. True, the person portrayed is of a sort which in life we would regard as enigmatic; but in drama, strictly speaking, there can be no enigmatic characters. The author's purpose is to reveal them, to make us understand them. If he does not, he has failed. What a colossus of sloppy dramaturgy could be hidden behind the contention that one's characters were enigmatic! And as for this character's relationship to the South of yesterday, such a tempestous young lady would have found herself in a peck of trouble in any

age. Nevertheless, Bette Davis' portrayal, as a dramatic performance, was touched with brilliance. And Wyler has handled his people and his camera in a masterful way.

Art Definition Advanced . . .

THE one thing we can know about art is that it consists of selected significance. If we accept this as a limited definition, then Wyler's production certainly is screen art, for few talking pictures have held such a careful and imaginative composition of significant incidents, character reactions, and pictorial components. And the screen scriptists have incorporated into the Owen Davis play one of the most vivid documents of life in the Old South to come to the screen. Unquestionably Jezebel will be on most critics' list of ten best at the close of the year.

INFORMATION IS WANTED . . .

SOME day I am going to corner a film editor, buttonhole him, and find out for a certainty just who and what is responsible for those big black dots which flash onto the screen periodically, even in the best of pictures. I judge they have served some purpose in editing the pictures, but why they should be left in I cannot understand. In quiet or sensitive scenes they are very disconcerting and they detract from the finish of a production.

HARRY BAUR in "Life and BEETHOVE

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CAMERA ANGLES

Bu Robert Joseph

LOST ART OF SHOWMANSHIP . .

THERE was a time when the exploitation-promo-I tion department of a press book meant something to the average exhibitor. There displayed were a hundred and one ideas for packing people into his theatres. Anything from store tie-ups to Main Street parades were suggested means whereby he could concentrate attention on the features playing at his theatre. However, press books, mechanical things at best, often turned out without any sort of inspiration, have taken on a certain sterility of ideas. Nevertheless, as obvious and as time-worn as some of the promotional gags may seem, they were there for the exhibitor to use. And the public, being rubberneck at heart, will stop to watch any kind of parade. Taking into account the fact that many of these exploitation schemes are a little useless, that in itself does not excuse the condition into which the exhibitor has permitted himself to fall. Reading between the lines of many a trade paper which gives periodical accounts of grosses, one can observe that box-office takes are falling like autumn leaves.

Thinning Out the Blood ...

FREE dishes, free games, free money, free cars, free candies, free tickets and free this and that have made the local cinema emporium more an institution of charity than a showplace. Bank Night and Dish Night and any other kind of night have made the exhibitor feel that these theatrical hors d'oeuvres can take the place of his active participation in packing them in. As a result the exhibitor has parked himself on his fanny and is letting the Cleveland office of the Free Dish Giveaway Incorporated and Limited Company run his box-office. In a way this long distance management has an advantage—for it permits the exhibitor more time to play poker in the projection room. But Bank Night, like Mah Jong and the Big Apple, is a fad, and there seems to be a tendency among box-office patrons to want good pictures. Parenthetically, it seems possible that many a Hollywood producer, who felt that theatre grosses were determined by the number of people who wanted to complete a chinaware dinner set, might have made his pictures with that in mind.

Picking the Pictures . . .

UT of the middlewest came a protest from one exhibitor who complained that the local chapter of the Parents and Teachers Association was selecting pictures for him. It seems that it had moved in on his theatre and directed him what pictures to buy and what not to buy. Now in many respects this step is both good and harmful. Good because any exhibitor who loses control of his theatre in this manner probably did not have good screen taste in the first place. Bad because it has removed from the

exhibitor his first and foremost duty—that of selecting film fare. The term "exhibitor" itself does not mean the man who takes the profits (if any) from the box-office and contracts to play two pictures—or four or six—a week for fifty-two weeks. The exhibitor, like the village pharmacist or grocer, is a community institution and should gauge his annual selections according to the taste and feelings of his patrons. Too much giveaways this and giveaways that have prostituted the exhibitor from a showman to a mere ticket-taker.

DE CRITICA CINEMATICA . . .

CDITOR CHESTER B. BAHN of Film Daily, Cought to know better. He quotes some observations of Movie Critic John Rosenwald, Jr., of the Dallas News anent the fact that some motion picture reviewers like to turn a neat phrase themselves occasionally, and nurture a bon mot with the same loving care that a horticulturist employs in coaxing an early pot of geraniums. The Texan commentator writes, "The critic uses both vehicle and performer as the material for rhetorical bravura. They are merely the subject matter for his play on words. . . . We have seen critics gloat over a turn of phrase with the same rapture that a movie actress contemplates her Adriangowned entrance into a Cedric Gibbons' penthouse." Mr. John Rosenwald, Jr. (with half an eye cocked Hollywood-wards), is indisputably right, for bon mots like the comments apropos The Buccaneer: "March comes in like a lion and goes out like a ham," and characterizing Cecil B. de Mille as "professor demeritus of history at Hollywood-by-the-Sea" are Dorothy Parkerisms that needed gentle cultivation.

Public Has Its Say . . .

IN SPITE of the slam-banging Buccaneer took at the hands of New York critics, the picture did a holdover business in Fort Wayne, Indiana, to the everlasting discredit of the authors of those flippancies. It is right, therefore, that Editor Bahn observes this "is an issue apart from the acknowledged right to exercise the critical prerogative." And let bells ring that "fortunately both for producer-distributor and the country's showmen, the high court of public opinion has seen fit to reverse the metropolitan wisecrackers." Let, therefore, all critics be honest and call a spade a spade. If a picture is bad let them say so in as few words. But not until they have felt the temper of public opinion and seen the box-office tally sheets. For otherwise their wisecracks might miss the target.

Why Review Pictures? . . .

THE next logical step following Editor Bahn's questions, "What about Paramount, with a small-sized fortune invested in The Buccaneer, and the exhibitor who has contracted for the picture? Is it . . . sporting to make him pay through the nose for a reviewer's verbal gymnastics?" might be either to dispense entirely with reviews, or have them written

more in the spirit of those of Film Daily which gave eloquent and clear-cut praise to many a picture that enjoyed neither holdovers nor profit. Some statistician might be able to work out a chart whereby picture praise would be predetermined by production costs—which would make High, Wide and Handsome the best picture since Mutiny on the Bounty.

MINOR NOTES ON MAJOR THEME . . .

NGLAND is discussing the possibility of turning **C** cinema houses into bombproof centers of refuge during air attacks. And the talk has reached such a stage that a government ruling was asked on third party responsibility for damages during such raids. Mr. A. R. Favell opined that there should be government insurance of film theatres should they act as storm cellars during attacks. . . . Mr. Martin Quigley to the contrary, English trade paper Cinema has this to say: "Central European film developments are a microcosm of the larger political world." And this statement was never truer. Before the recent Anschluss, Germany and Austria made binding trade agreements regarding films. The Nazi film industry has penetrated far into the Balkans and wields the big stick over Yugoslavia, Roumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and even Czechoslovakia. . . . Hollywood should open its gates to Judge Curtis Bok who stated censorship is un-American, and whose ruling permitted the free exhibition of Baltic Deputy, an Amkino film. . . British Screenwriter's manifesto read in part: "In days of growing international rivalry, a means of propaganda, or at least of propagating national ideals in dramatic form, must be maintained." And what better American propaganda can there be than that which seeks peace? . . . When increasing thousands who watch Europe are wondering whether democracy is really worthwhile after all, a picture like It Can't Happen Here will reaffirm our earnest devotion to it. In 1935 there was a foreign market for Hollywood. Now Central Europe under Nazi control, Spain, Germany, Japan and China are not (1) exhibiting American pictures and (2) sending money out of the country. What happens now to the argument that the Lewis book on the screen would adversely affect box-office grosses?

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

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Pictures As a Business

The Editor Goes Into Figures and Shows
That Greater Costs Did Not Make
Corresponding Increase in Film
Theatre Audiences

Contributor Discusses Racketeering in the Purchase of Screen Story Material

Bruno David Ussher Analyzes Use of Music in Andrew Stone's "Stolen Heaven"

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STOLEN HEAVEN ★ DOCTOR RHYTHM ★ FOUR MEN AND A PRAYER LUCREZIA BORGIA ★ THE WIFE OF GENERAL LING ★ WIDE OPEN FACES

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM

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FINANCIAL ASPECT OF PICTURES . . .

AKING motion pictures is a business whose units are owned by stockholders in all parts of the country, a serious business turning out product expensive to make. A starving artist cannot take a roll of film into his garret and make a cinematic gem. A few hundred thousand dollars must be invested before a start can be made with even a simple picture. In the Hollywood district \$200,000,000 has been spent on the plants in which screen entertainment is manufactured. The film industry ranks with the greatest American industries, having a total investment of \$2,000,000,000 in studios, theatres and allied enterprises. A couple of years ago you probably thought the country had all the theatres it needed. In 1937, \$29,500,000 was spent on new theatre construction and 2008 were added by reopening or new construction. In 1936 it cost \$135,000,000 to make 1446 feature-length pictures and shorts; in 1937 it cost \$170,000,000 to make 1311. You will notice it cost \$35,000,000 more to make 136 less films.

Box-Office and the Recession . . .

NY expenditure is justified if it proves profitable. A During the first nine months of 1937 some of the production companies showed a handsome excess in profits over the same period in the previous year. But the last quarter did not hold up so well even though the theatres of the country were showing the fewer pictures which cost more to make. Costing more to make, we surely can assume the additional expense was incurred in making the fewer pictures correspondingly more entertaining. But if they were more entertaining, why the abrupt falling off in box-office receipts when their showing in theatres was at its peak? The recession? History has established as a fact that the amusement business is the last to feel a financial depression. The motion picture was the last to feel the one which started with the explosion in 1929. In 1930 motion picture attendance in the United States reached an all-time weekly high of 110,000,000. Today it is 80,000,000. In 1935, when the depression was functioning to full capacity, it was 80,000,000, climbing that far back from a low of 60,000,000 in 1932-33. During the last seven years of the silent picture ending in 1928, attendance climbed progressively from 40,000,000 to 65,000,000.

Pictures Responsible for Slump . . .

THE stand-still attitude of picture attendance today I is ascribed by Hollywood to Mr. Roosevelt's Recession. The fact is, however, that while the picture depression started quite a long time after the general depression got under way—thus proving the rule that the amusement business is the last to feel a general decline in business—the picture depression which cut down receipts in the last quarter of last year, almost beat the Recession in getting away from the post. That rather would indicate that pictures were responsible for their own slump and that general conditions had little to do with it. And do not overlook the fact that in 1937 Hollywood spent \$35,000,000 more on its pictures than it did the year before, made fewer pictures, thereby spending more per picture to make them better, and still in the last quarter of the year did not make as much money as it did in the last quarter of 1936. Now what I am getting at is this: If at the increased expenditure of \$35,000,000 the talking picture cannot hold the audience cheaper pictures assembled-well, where is the film industry going to get off if it continues to make the kind of pictures it is making now?

Not Healthy Progression . . .

O SUPPLY the present audience with screen enter-I tainment Hollywood is spending more than one hundred million dollars in excess of what it cost to entertain the audience in 1928, and today's audience is only 15,000,000 greater than the 1928 audience. An increase of away over one hundred per cent in cost to increase the market by a little less than twenty-five per cent scarcely can be reckoned as healthy business progression. Certainly the extra \$35,000,000 which the film business spent last year served only to keep intact the audience it previously had established. Spending the extra amount on a smaller number of pictures means that the average cost of pictures greatly exceeded the 1936 average. This suggests some interesting questions. What stupendous sum will Hollywood have to spend to work its way back into the peak talkie attendance which is 30,000,000 above the present figure? And on what kind of pictures can it spend the additional millions? Surely the gigantic, stupendous, colossal peak already has been attained. Can Metro give us anything more exquisite than its Romeo and Juliet or more thrilling

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than its San Francisco? Can Sam Goldwyn give us anything more overwhelming than his Hurricane or more joyous than his Follies? Earthquake, hurricane and fire already have done their darndest. In Gold Is Where You Find It, Warners have turned loose a flood and there is only a volcano left, and no producer yet seems to have discovered what to do with one if he had it.

Becoming Too Colossal . . .

AND is more money per picture the way out? Scarcely. Hollywood producers must stop doing what Jack Warner so aptly describes as "turning out pictures for their own amazement." That is what they have been doing. Each one has been trying to beat the other fellow. Spectacles have bulged from square yards to acres and seem destined to end only with the range of vision. And the cost! Whew! Only a few years ago a million-dollar picture would have been as colossal as an undertaking as its press agent could claim it was as entertainment. But today it seems that production only has started nicely when the first million has been spent. Conquest, the most recent Garbo picture, cost a little this side of three million, Goldwyn Follies a little the other side of two million. And still you never saw even one million dollars on the screen. You have seen pictures against which one or more millions have been charged, but you have not seen one upon which that much has been spent in creating what you see.

Why Costs Are High ...

COMETIMES a dozen scripts are written before one D is decided upon for production. The dozen appear on the cost sheet. When stars are waiting for a picture to begin, their salaries while idle are charged to it. When the picture emerges, it leaves on the cutting room floor whole sequences which were shot expensively on the off chance of their being used. But the public pays for them with its dimes and quarters. There is the main weakness of the Hollywood system of handling picture finances. Instead of paying for its own mistakes, it assesses the cost of them against its customers. A picture upon which one million dollars has been spent and another million wasted, is bally-hooed to the world as a two-milliondollar production and charged for accordingly. Can it go on? It cannot.

WILL ANNOY MARTIN QUIGLEY . . .

WHEN the suggestion is made that Hollywood should produce a picture which should produce a picture which would be a plea for universal peace, it is met with the argument that the sole mission of the screen is to entertain, not to indulge in propaganda. The Quigley publications break out in a rash every time peace propaganda is mentioned. The Spectator, in urging the making of an anti-war picture, has not challenged the argument that the mission of the screen is to entertain. Its plea has been for a producer to make the peace plea entertaining; but even that is opposed by those who share Martin Quigley's total lack of comprehension of the opportunity the film industry has to make money by

giving the world what it needs so badly—a picture which will reveal the complete futility of war. "It can't be done," says Hollywood, even in view of the fact that it already has been done in the case of Century's Four Men and a Prayer reviewed in this Spectator (page 6). It is not the anti-war picture, but it is propaganda against the munitions evil. I tremble at the thought of the convulsions there will be in the Quigley offices when it is realized that in spite of Martin's anti-propaganda proclamation, a propaganda picture has been made.

SOMETHING WILL WOULD APPROVE . . .

DAUL MUNI, appearing in a Warner short reel, will tell audiences in most of our film theatres that in honor of the late Will Rogers institutions to care for under-privileged children will be founded with the money contributions the audiences are invited to make. "And," says Paul, "that is something Will would like." The short is an entertaining little thing which the studio made for free distribution to exhibitors, four hundred prints now being distrib-

ALEC TEMPLETON, GREAT MUSICIAN . . .

IJITH over one hundred pieces of printed music already to his credit, twenty-six-year-old Alec Templeton, now appearing at the Cocoanut Grove where he is accorded the unusual distinction of a night spot audience remaining absolutely silent while he entertains it, is destined to be recognized as one of the really great musicians of the day. His memory is astounding. Seated at the piano, his nimble fingers pour into ears of his listeners his own interpretation of any composition asked for—symphonies, ballads, popular songs of the day, works of his own, come from the instrument as great music. Although he cannot see what appears on the screen, he is a regular attendant at film theatres. In England he has composed scores for pictures. A script is read to him and he proceeds to write the score to match the scenes as he interprets them. He has played with symphony orchestras in Europe and this country, his appearances at popular resorts being limited to the Rainbow Room, New York, and the Grove here. He plans to devote himself to composing. He is a charming young man to meet, a happy, kindly, human person, with keen intelligence and a lively sense of humor. One of his greatest pleasures is playing for his friends. Such a brilliant musician should be kept in Hollywood. The screen is the ideal medium for the exploitation of his genius.

APPROVES THE SUGGESTION . . .

FROM Charles P. Jervey, Hartford, Connecticut, I received this letter: "Once again, I have occasion to address you and express my appreciation for a fine article on the need for more realistic work for peace and against war. I am referring now to your comments beginning 'Each morning the newspapers demonstrate afresh that, of all His creations, Man is the

one of whom God must be most ashamed.' I only hope that your suggestion that the situation would be a great theme for a motion picture will some day, before it is too late, be accepted by someone with the ability to 'do the job.' I am especially glad, too, that you particularly commented upon the insane preparedness moves which are now being made by our own country. Unquestionably, we are preparing, not against war with some unknown country, but definitely for war, with Japan. And some of the powers that be will perhaps be sorry if we should not have the opportunity to use these weapons which are being prepared. Please keep up the great work!"

EASTERNERS AGREE WITH BRUNO . . .

THE note of warning, first sounded in the Spectator by Bruno David Ussher, that Deanna Durbin's singing voice should be given a long rest, is being repeated by Eastern picture and radio commentators. Someone should make the journey out to Universal and tell Charlie Rogers the one about the goose and the golden egg.

DR. FIDLER, CONSULTANT . . .

DURING his recent illness Bill Powell probably spent a lot of money for services of the doctors who attended him. They told him it was safe to go back to work. Jimmie Fidler in a recent broadcast told Bill he should not go back to work. If Jimmie, as an act of friendship, had taken the case at the outset, Bill could have saved all the money and would not now be risking his life by taking the doctors' word for it that he is fit to resume his acting career. Jimmie should branch out. No doubt Einstein would like to be set right on his scientific theories and Henry Ford would be glad to learn how to make motor cars.

MUSICALS AND MURDER ...

UNQUESTIONABLY a big factor in the success of a picture is the manner of its projection in the various houses in which it is shown. While staying overnight in a small town we attended its picture house, then showing Naughty Marietta. The sound was awful, Nelson Eddy's voice came from the screen as a high, and what musicians would call a 'white" tenor, and Jeanette MacDonald scaled heights which Lily Pons never would attempt. The theatre manager explained the small attendance by saying his people did not care for singing pictures, and that, anyway, he did not think Jeanette and Eddy had voices worth listening to. He was right about that; as they sounded in his house they certainly were not worth listening to. It might pay the film industry to make some effort to have sound projection standardized. Gladys Swarthout's voice was recorded for Romance In the Dark up to about eighty-five percent of trueness; in small theatres audiences will get about twenty per cent. Musical pictures can not maintain box-office strength in face of such brutal treatment as that.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

EIGHT A.M. Two hours, with time out for breakfast, of work in the garden already behind me, and now I have to give some thought to my Spectator duties. But I am back in the garden, Freddie, the spaniel, curled in the rustic chair beside the one I am seated in, and Bo Peep, the Peke, audibly gnawing at a bone she herself transported from the kitchen; the sun lifting the morning haze; birds in the pepper, locust and mulberry trees singing for the breakfast already spread for them beside the bath which before noon they will empty with their splashings; a distant rooster crows, a dog barks, from far away comes the dwindling purr of a motor carmuted sounds which make the morning silence, the indolent silence of rural life. . . . But now to my Spectator job. . . . Last night I saw a pict . . . Just noticed a gorgeous Sun Kiss rose, the first of that variety this season; and after admiring it, went around to the back of the house and looked again at Mrs. Spectator's sweet peas, the finest I have seen in Southern California. . . . What about the picture I saw last night? I forgot why I mentioned it. . . Better stick in the garden... Like to know what I have in it? It is a fascinating place; just now composed mostly of beds of smooth, rich earth, each dotted with low green things, lying close to it, sending down into it tiny tendrils through which they suck up life which later will be expressed in all the colors on nature's palette and all the perfumes she

Meanderings Continued . . .

GARDEN'S promise is its spring allure; its ful-A filment, a summer and autumn joy. That long, curved bed, for instance, is not much to look atjust a stretch of brown soil in the shade of pepper trees. When the little things which dot it now achieve the end to which nature guides them, the bed will be a mass of subdued colors, Christmas Cheer begonias in the background, velvety coleus covering the center expanse, Cora Bells, with their rich foliage, red stems and red drooping flowers, forming a border which curves with the graveled path. That is one of the beds, a shaded one, but there are many others, some which sit all day in the sun and will be particularly brilliant when their colors develope; others partly shaded, and one is the surprise bed. Judging by the appearance of the small plants now growing sturdy in it, there are a couple of dozen different varieties which will have to bloom before we know what they are. But these are some of the varieties we know we have: Geums, foxglove, delphinium, zinias, giant asters, salpiglossis, poppies, verbena, stocks, gladiolus, painted daisies, sweet William pom pom zinias, phlox, penstemon, cosmos, shasta daisies, hollyhocks, canna, and oodles of roses. As I sit here in the shade of a locust tree which is draping itself in its fragrant blossoms, do you wonder at my failure to remember what I intended to say about the picture I saw last night? Anyway, Freddie has brought me his rubber ball, and that means serious business which must be attended to at once.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

CENTURY PRESENTS A WINNER . . .

◆ FOUR MEN AND A PRAYER: 20th-Fox picture and release: Darryl F. Zanuck in charge of production; directed by John Ford; associate producer, Kenneth Macgowan; screen play by Richard Sherman. Sonya Levien and Walter Ferris; from a book by David Garth: photography, Ernest Palmer; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Rudolph Sternad; set decorations by Thomas Little; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes, Royer; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Cast: Loretta Young, Richard Greene, George Sanders, David Niven, C. Aubrey Smith, J. Edward Bromberg, William Henry, John Carradine, Alan Hale, Reginald Denny, Berton Churchill, Barry Fitzgerald, Claude King, Cecil Cunningham, Frank Dawson, John Sutton, Lina Basquette, Frank Baker, William Stack, Harry Hayden, Will Stanton, Winter Hall, Lionel Pape, Brandon Hurst, John Spacey, C. Montague Shaw.

DEAUTIFULLY done. Thanks to the brilliant **B** direction of John Ford, this heart-warming story of the love of four sons for their father, comes to the screen as one of the not many very fine pictures we have had this season. Superbly mounted and artistically photographed, it has much to offer in a visual way. It always has been a Spectator contention that the story is not the determining factor in the success or failure of a motion picture, that the important think is how the story is told. The story of Four Men and a Prayer, stripped to its essentials, is about as lurid and well punctuated with murders as are those of which the horror thrillers are made to take their places on double bills. It would have lent itself admirably to the hiss, scowl and pant method of telling, but it comes from the Century studio as a great, dignified screen offering of vast credit to all those who had a hand in its making. Trust John Ford to plumb the depths of a story's emotional possibilities. Never obvious in his approach, always gentle in his method, he nevertheless with telling force injects sudden heart-throbs which stir the audience and bring responsive tears.

Some Emotional Moments . . .

E ARLY in the picture the father and four manly sons face the portrait of their departed wife and mother and quietly drink a toast to her memory. There had been no previous mention of her, no incident which gave her a place in the story, but so ably had Ford developed the atmosphere of the picture, the quiet, simple gesture of the five men made a deeply touching scene. Again in the closing sequence in which we see the four sons backing from the room in which the King of England had bestowed posthumously the Victoria Cross upon their father whose murder they had avenged and whose name they had cleared, we have another of those quiet emotional thrusts which gain cumulative value by the manner in which Ford builds to them. The production and direction combine to make the picture greater than the story, proving my contention that the manner of telling is more important than what is told. I am not belittling the screen play. It is an admirable piece of scenario writing, a deeply human document enlivened at intervals by flashes of wit and little touches discernably directed and ably acted.

Reveals Munitions Evil . . .

THE story has the advantage of being about something, of having greater significance than would attach to a narrative concerning only one family and affecting only the members of it. The evil wrought by the promiscuous sales of munitions is brought out strongly, a theme given timely application by virtue of civilization's present trend. Munition makers are the villains of the story, which gives the picture international flavor. It also has a wide geographical sweep, beginning in India, touching Washington, jumping to both London and rural England, then to South America, and finally back to London where it ends in Buckingham Palace. The various locales gave Century an opportunity to present an imposing production, an opportunity it availed itself of to the full by giving us one of the most visually attractive settings we have had in years.

Well Cast, Well Acted . . .

THE father in the picture is played by Aubrey Smith, the sons by Richard Greene, George Sanders, David Niven and William Henry. It is ideal casting, each of them giving a perfect performance. Niven reveals a comedy sense only hinted at in previous appearances. Young Greene, whom I understand Century is to develope into a leading man of importance, seems to have everything it will take to make the plan successful. Greene is handsome, has a good voice and is a pleasing actor. A stablemate of Tyrone Power, he will give that young man some strong competition for the favor of the fair sex. Loretta Young is the girl in the picture. As clever as ever, she is handicapped in this picture by some of the gowns she wears. In one scene she wears an inverted jelly mold as a hat and a ruffled potato sack as a gown, an ensemble so fascinating that it occupied my attention to the exclusion of the meaning of the scene. Music plays a prominent part in the satisfaction the picture will give, and credit for that goes to Louis Silver. Louis Loeffler deserves mention for a capable job of film editing.

ANDREW STONE HAS AN IDEA . . .

• STOLEN HEAVEN: Paramount picture and release; directed by Andrew L. Stone; screen play by Eve Greene and Frederick Jackson; based on a story by Andrew L. Stone; photographed by William C. Mellor; art direction by Hans Dreier and Franz Bachelin; edited by Doane Harrison; dances staged by Le Roy Prinz; musical direction, Boris Morros; music from Liszt, Grieg, Moszkowski, Johann Strauss, Chopin and Wagner; musical advisor, Phil Boutelje; assistant director, John H. Morse; song by Frank Loesser and Manning Sherwin, Cast: Gene Raymond, Olympe Bradna, Glenda Farrell, Lewis Stone, Porter Hall, Douglas Dumbrille, Joseph Sawyer, Esther Dale, Charles Judels, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Charles Halton, Bert Roach, Rolfe Sedan, Horace Murphy.

E IGHT or nine years ago a young fellow came to me with a screen story and an idea of how it should be presented. He told me his name was Andrew Stone. So impressed was I with the story and

its young author that I spoke to some producers about him and wrote things about him for the Spectator. But Andy proved to be ahead of his times. He thought purely in motion picture terms, in terms of the fundamentals of Hollywood's business, and in Hollywood that is not done even yet by those in control of the film industry's destinies. However, in Bill Le Baron Andy finally found someone who could see that the young fellow had something, and Stolen Heaven is evidence both of Bill's judgment and the wisdom of it. What I cannot understand about the whole thing is why it took a major studio so long to discover what was so obvious to me eight or nine years ago. But what matters now is that young Stone has been given his opportunity and has availed himself of it in a most satisfactory manner.

Music Is Part of Story . . .

ONCE before Andy made a picture in which music was an integral part of the story. It was The Girl Said No, which made generous use of the Gilbert words and the Sullivan music. In Stolen Heaven he advances his conception of screen music one step farther towards its ultimate fulfilment—a step already far in advance of that taken by any other director, but only hinting at what we may expect from him. In Stolen Heaven, Andy has wedded an ordinary crook drama to the music of Strauss, Liszt, Chopin, Grieg and Moszkowski. That is what, when I first met him, he told me he wanted to do-to make music a story element, to introduce it at intervals to advance the story, not as interpolated numbers of value to the picture only to the extent of their musical worth. For instance, Liszt's Second Hungarian Rhapsody has been given a visual setting, whether or not it is what the composer may have imagined when he composed the music, being a matter of no concern. Stone keeps it within the story by having the principal actors in sight throughout the entire presentation of the number. While we listen to the music we see the story being advanced by the people involved in it, thus keeping alive our interest in the plot.

Is a Refreshing Departure . . .

THE most striking example of Stone's union of music and cinema is the treatment of Liszt's Liebestraum in the closing sequence. Lewis Stone, playing a once world famous concert pianist, has been deluded into the belief that in his old age he still is great. His return to the concert stage is announced and a large number of admirers assemble for his first concert. The drama of his appearance is woven cleverly into the crook story, suspense being created by speculation as to whether he will display his old time mastery of the piano. Thus we have a great musical number, entertaining on its own account, becoming a dramatic incident in the forward progression of an ordinary crime drama which gets its chief value as screen entertainment from its association with some of the world's greatest music. That surely is a departure, and it comes at a time when the motion picture screen is badly in need of a few new ideas. How the picture will appeal to the general public is something the box-office will have to demonstrate, but it is one everyone engaged in a creative branch of picture production most certainly should see.

From Motion Picture Standpoint . . .

IEAVING to Dr. Ussher the task of discussing Stolen Heaven from the standpoint of the music it contains (page 12), and regarding it purely as a motion picture designed to catch the popular fancy, I find myself at a loss. Certainly I advise you to see it. Olympe Bradna alone makes it worthwhile. She is the girl who played opposite George Raft in Souls At Sea and had a small part in some other Hollywood-made picture. Young, beautiful, talented, she seems to have everything which makes for success. The perfect synchronization of her action and Franchia White's voice in several singing numbers, will earn for her a reputation as a vocalist of outstanding merit. Gene Raymond was not the best choice for the leading male role, a part demanding a greater emotional range than he has at his command. Lewis Stone gives a beautiful performance as the old musician. All the other members of the cast prove acceptable, Andrew Stone's direction of the action demonstrating his possession of a dramatic sense to add to his ideas regarding the use of music. Eve Greene and Frederick Jackson had no easy task to perform in writing the screen play to bring in smoothly all the different elements, but they succeeded admirably. To Hans Dreier and his associates in the art department go praise for an unusually attractive production. The dances staged by the capable Le Roy Prinz also are an outstanding feature of the picture.

FRANK TUTTLE DELIVERS . . .

● DOCTOR RHYTHM; Paramount release of Emanuel Cohen production; directed by Frank Tuttle; screen play by Jo Swerling and Richard Connell; from the story "The Badge of Policeman O'Roon," by O. Henry; associate producer, Herbert Polesie; sketch "Double Damask Napkin," by Dion Titheradge; musical direction, George Stoll; music and lyrics by John Burke and James V. Monaco; arrangements, John Scott Trotter; dance ensembles, Jack Crosby; photography, Charles Lang; art direction, Wiard Ihnen; wardrobe, Basia Bassett; assistant director, Russell Matthews. Cast: Bing Crosby, Mary Carlisle, Beatrice Lillie, Andy Devine, Rufe Davis, Laura Hope Crews, Fred Keating, John Hamilton, Sterling Holloway, Henry Wadsworth, Franklin Pangborn, Harold Minjir, William Austin, Gino Corrado, Harry Stubbs, Frank Elliott, Charles Moore.

EXCELLENT entertainment. The script gave Frank Tuttle an opportunity to display in his direction the lively sense of humor which makes his pictures outstanding. Good taste is another characteristic of his interpretation of a script, and his long experience as a director in the silent era developed in him a sense of visual values which makes each of his talkies a nearer approach to the true motion picture than most of his contemporaries are attaining. Doctor Rhythm was designed only to amuse, and Frank makes it vastly amusing. It trips along gaily from beginning to end, with never a dull moment and

punctuated throughout with just the right number of musical and spectacle interpolations to maintain the high level of the entertainment quality. Nothing is overdone, even Bing Crosby's vocal contributions being more infrequent than we have been taught to expect when we see his name at the head of a picture's cast.

Bing Crosby As An Actor . . .

BING'S singing, of course, is a big feature of Doctor Rhythm, but, as is the case with each of his screen appearances, his acting also is a big feature. To me he always has been one of the easiest, smoothest actors on the screen, one with a true sense of comedy values and appreciation of the possibilities of romantic scenes. He is at his best in pictures directed by Frank Tuttle. Just as Doctor Rhythm wisely leaves us with the feeling that we could have stood a lot more of Bing's singing, so does it make us feel we could have stood a lot more of Bee Lillie's comedy. This Canadian girl, who reached the American stage via London, is a delight in this Paramount offering. A really brilliant bit of comedy is a scene in which she endeavors to purchase two dozen double damask napkins in a department store, the sketch, written by Dion Titheradge, being one of the highspots of the production. In it Bee is assisted by Franklin Pangborn, Harold Minjir and William Austin, each of whom helps greatly in keeping the fun at a high level.

Cohen's Auspicious Exit . . .

OTHERS who make valuable contributions to the picture are the clever and attractive Mary Carlisle; Andy Devine, Laura Hope Crews, Fred Keating and Frank Elliott. The smaller parts are handled as acceptably. Doctor Rhythm is the last picture Emanuel Cohen made for Paramount before his contract with it exploded and he was paid a huge sum to resist the temptation to make any more for the same release. It is an impressive exit from the Paramount reservation, a musical picture not cut from the same pattern that has been used so often by all producers. The screen play by Jo Swerling and Richard Connell is well written, but I think the story would have been improved if it had not opened with a drunken spree. My view is that a funny thing a man does when he

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is sober is funnier than a funny thing he does when he is drunk. Drunkenness is not as good box-office as sobriety. The opening scene in Doctor Rhythm will offend a lot of people, and I cannot see the wisdom of gratuitously incorporating in a picture anything that will offend even a few people. Of course, it takes more thinking to invent sober fun, but it can be done.

HITS THE BULL'S-EYE . . .

• WIDE OPEN FACES; David L. Loew picture for RKO release; stars Joe E. Brown; associate producer, Edward Gross; director, Kurt Neumann; original story by Richard Flourney; screen play by Earle Snell, Clarence Marks and Joe Bigelow. with additional dialogue by Pat C. Flick; photography, Paul C. Vogel; art director, John Ducasse Schulze; film editor, Jack Ogilvie; musical director, Dr. Hugo Reisenfeld, with Jay Chernis as associate; recording director, Tom Carman: Cast: Jane Wyman, Alison Skipworth, Lyda Roberti, Alan Baxter, Lucien Littlefield, Sidney Toler, Berton Churchill, Barbara Pepper, Joseph Downing, Stanley Fields, Horace Murphy, Garry Owen, Dick Rich, Walter Wills, Joe E. Marks.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

OE E. BROWN does it again. Here is another Jracy comedy, a pot-pourri of gags held together by a story which, if only a variation on a formula, is given freshness by the zest with which it is told. The whole thing is plainly "sure-fire" stuff, but considering the market for which it was aimed, it must be admitted that the picture hits the bull's-eye. Children will scream and writhe with excitement from its thrills and with hilarity engendered by its humor. Joe's large and constant following of adults will also be mightily entertained. Those who take their cinema seriously have learned long ago what to expect from these comedies, and will not misspend any of their nickels. So I guess everybody will be happy. From a business standpoint one cannot but admire the system to which the production and distribution of Joe E. Brown comedies have been reduced. This is one of the few production enterprises in Hollywood that is a business. It is known beforehand how much is going into a picture and how much is coming out.

One Gag a Gem ...

COME of the gags are imaginative; others are oldtimers. Almost all of them are well pointed. One is certainly a gem, the funniest I have seen in a picture for ages. During the racy climax, Jane Wyman, anxious to get a "put-put" motorboat started, gives the cord around the wheel at the top of the motor a hefty yank, such a one that the cord sings through the air and snaps Joe on a bent posterior. It's really capitally done. I snicker yet. Comedian Brown is in good acting fettle, playing his scenes with much esprit. Jane Wyman is very capable at the comedy stuff. Alison Skipworth, the late Lyda Roberti, Stanley Fields and a sizable cast of well-known players contribute competently to the goings on. Alan Baxter, evidently having been caught in the maelstrom of type-casting, again appears as a sinister bad man. Director Kurt Neumann, as I have intimated, has given his material vitality and freshness. The traditional chase at the close of the piece is

adroitly caught by Cameraman Paul C. Vogel, especially the scene in which the boob-hero and the gal, being pursued by a train, pump a hand-car up to the crest of a drawbridge that is drawing.

REALLY A NICE GIRL . . .

● LUCREZIA BORGIA; produced by La Compagnie du Cinema de France; directed by Abel Gance. Cast: Edwige Feuerille, Gabriel Gabrio, Aime Clairiond, Roger Karl, Josette Day, Maurice Escande, Dumesnil, Artault, Max Michel.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

REDEEMED Lucrezia Borgia makes her appear-A ance in the film of that name produced by La Compagnie du Cinema de France, which recently held forth at the Grand Theatre. It seems that the young woman so prevalently associated with poisonings and other unpleasantries by a benighted public, was really quite a nice girl, more sinned against than sinning, her brother Česare, a ferocious fellow, being responsible for most of Lucrezia's disrepute. She may have indulged in light-of-loves, red-blooded Renaissance maiden that she was, but that was her limit; she was in truth appalled by the murder going on about her, and genuinely grieved at the death of one of the husbands chosen for her by Cesare, having deeply loved the ill-fated spouse. Well, maybe so. I am not sufficiently up on my Borgias to say. But as a student of drama I can point out that the convincing mingling of good and bad elements in a character calls for master craftsmanship, a craftsmanship not evident in the present piece.

Legend Stays in Effect . . .

UCREZIA, consequently, is not always clearly Lamotivated, treads occasionally the quagmire of ambiguity. The director and writer, of course, were handicapped by having to keep the censors in mind. Be that as it may, the character never quite convinces us. Despite that Edwige Feuerille brings a wide range of emotion and considerable color to her portrayal, most spectators will probably continue to conceive the Borgia lady as a sinister dame. Cesare Borgia, played by Gabriel Gabrio, is more convincing, being a devil personified, though some of his villainy is so deep-dyed that it resembles the kind American audiences accepted two decades ago. Machiavelli and Alexander VI are more subtle, and the recounting of their problems and intrigues adds historical interest to the picture.

Few Would Be Shocked . . .

THE French film, however, is definitely not one that would appeal to the general public. There is nothing "hot" about it, advertising to the contrary notwithstanding. Bare breasts are to be seen in a couple of sequences, but such demonstrations are commonplaces in the Scandals and innumerable "art" magazines, and no one but a boob would be naive enough to gulp at the sight of them. Cesare's manner toward his sister in one scene is probably supposed to indicate he has incestuous thoughts, but there are no overt manifestations of them. In photography, continuity and direction the picture is far

below the standard of American films. French theatrical tradition is much in evidence in the playing. The actors, well-schooled, are to be admired for their bodily control and technical accomplishment, and they have moments of power, but much of their playing is too broad and too obviously calculated for screen purposes. Persons with special interests, students of history or of acting, or those who are intrigued by the different flavor of European films, may find it worth their while. There is one really magnificent scene in the picture—the mob is storming the palace, intent on ousting the Borgias, beating its way up a long flight of stairs, when suddenly the gigantic doors at the top open and Alexander VI stands boldly before them in his flowing white robe, incarnating all the tremendous power of the church; they cower and kneel in prayer before him.

BAD ONE FROM BRITAIN . . .

● WIFE OF GENERAL LING; produced and distributed by Gaumont-British; producer, John Stafford; directed by Ladislaus Vajda; story by Peter Cheney; screen play by Akos Tolney; editor, R. Thomas; photography by James Wilson. Cast: Griffith Jones, Inkijinoff, Adrianne Renn, Alan Napier, Anthony Eustrel, Jino Soneya, Hugh McDermott, Gibson Howland, Gabrielle Brune, Lotus Fragrance, Marion Spencer, Billy Holland, George Merritt, Howard Douglas.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

UST when Alexander Korda is re-establishing the Jonce high position of the British film with his four outstanding hits in New York, Storm In a Teacup, Divorce of Lady X, Gaiety Girls and Return of Scarlet Pimpernel, all doing holdover business, Gaumont-British spoils the effect with its Wife of General Ling. Several years ago, directly after the success of Henry VIII, British studios descended on Hollywood en masse and brought back to Albion's shores some of the best native talent in acting, writing, technical and directing lines. For a time the British film was a threat to box-office supremacy, and the day when a spectator would yawn in protest that he was seeing one of them English pitchers" seemed over. And Ling is a throwback to "one of them English pitchers." There is little to commend it. The plot is trite; the direction poor, the acting indifferent.

Case of Griffith Jones . . .

GRIFFITH JONES, a British intelligence officer outwitting a murderous war lord who poses as a Hong Kong (British territory) philanthropist, appeared in Yank At Oxford. He was Beaumont,



"Where Pets are Treated Right"

sworn enemy of Robert Taylor. For some his performance was as engaging as the international favorite's. Yet in the present picture his acting is nothing short of hammy. On the other hand, under Jack Conway's direction in Yank Griffith Jones emerged as a clear-cut character, as a definite personality. In Ling when Jones is trapped by the war lord's men he pleads for his life in a manner that stamped him as somewhat of a coward. All in all, young Jones, for all his looks, seemed to be an arrogant sort of pup, intolerable in all events.

Faulty Script . . .

THE fault is with the script, of course. Telling the story of an intelligence officer's efforts to uncover a mass gun-running plot from Hong Kong to a distant war lord, the narrative rambles on, with the usual amount of oriental mystery hokum, sudden deaths and subtle poisonings. The love interest of the story transpires between Jones and the occidental wife of General Ling. As an obvious sop to those who might find misregeneration a little revolting, the wife, erstwhile lover of the secret agent, assures him of her non-defilement, points out that her relations with her husband have been purely platonic. An odd system of mores, no doubt, but evidently a phase of Britain's Far East policy of British supremacy. I mention this glaring instance of bad taste because it is illustrative of the lack of attention given to the shooting script. Mme. Ling's protestation that she married her husband as part of a bargain which stipulated that a virginal status quo was to exist seemed weak and not a little silly.

ALTHOUGH events of world significance are going on in the Far East, Gaumont-British dug up this dated one from the shelves of the past. Such an offering might have been timely some five or ten years ago. The saving grace of the present picture, however, is the performance of Anthony Eustrel as See Long, the Chinese patriot whose life is sacrificed that the British intelligence officer may know that Wong, the philanthropist, and Ling the ruthless war lord, are one. In the midst of over-acting, his restraint was refreshing. Gibson Gowland, a favorite of the silent era, gives a good performance as the leader of a guntunning outfit.

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THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

CAT IN THE BAG ESCAPES . . .

DISQUIETING bent for mathematics has Frank A S. Nugent of the New York Times, who brings his gifts of calculation to bear on some statistics recently quoted by Will Hays in his address to the motion picture industry, and draws the conclusion that the film czar has at last let a long-guarded cat out of the bag. The secretive feline, according to the columnist, is the fact that motion picture theatre patronage is far below the figure of some eighty odd millions a week, which the film industry has long boasted of, and which Mr. Hays again quotes in this report. The evidence for Writer Nugent's deduction is contained in the following words of Mr. Hays, which follow upon an assertion that the film industry has far from reached the saturation point in movie attendance: "Ten years ago it was estimated, and probably accurately, that the total motion picture attendance was drawn from approximately 25 per cent of our American population. During the closing months of 1937 an experimental poll indicated that there are still 26,000,000 persons over 12 years of age who do not go more than five times a year, and there are millions more who cannot be considered regular patrons of the movies. In this fact lies the importance of our work in bringing new customers to the motion picture theatre."

Will Someone Explain? . . .

WRITER NUGENT deduces, "... if the total population, as of the 1930 census, was 122,000,000, and if 24,000,000 of those were under 10 years of age, and if another 26,000,000 (over 12) go to the movies only five times a year, and if millions more cannot be considered regular patrons, then it would seem that Hollywood counts 85,000,000 paid admissions each week but has possibly fewer than 40,000,000 patrons." What say, Mr. Hays? What say, Hollywood?

WHERE ARE THE SQUIRRELS? ...

ROM Bob, up-and-coming young printer, whose deft fingers glide o'er the keys of the linotype to cast in lead many of the pages perused by Spectator readers, comes the information I recently sought in this column anent those great black dots which zoom periodically onto the screen, even in the best of films. I had imagined they were left on the film from the editing process, and had expressed my intention of cornering an editor to find out their function and why they had not been eliminated. But it seems the disfiguring black dots are supposed to be there. According to Bob, who used to work in a projection booth, these dots are placed on the film so that the operator will know when to start the machine that will run off the next reel. In silent-picture days a

certain title in the story would indicate to the operator that he was to start the next machine, but now that there are no more titles, generally speaking, dots are put onto the film.

Sensitive Scene Is Marred . . .

LL of which is nothing short of asinine. Millions A of dollars are spent on pictures, tremendous creative energy goes into them, and then, when a film is ready for the public, some one puts black dots on it. In Jezebel one zooms onto the screen at the apex of a finely sensitive scene, and with such telling effect that it could not have been more disruptive if designedly placed by a master dramatist. My mind does not run to mechanics, but I can think of half a dozen potential devices, aural and visual, which would serve to indicate the end of a reel to an operator without marring valuable film. Too bad the squirrels back in the hills are not adventurous enough to come down into Hollywood. They would have choice pickings.

GIVE US THE BACHS ...

MABEL KEEFER'S recent suggestion of a motion picture based upon the Bachs is one with a wealth of possibilities. From Veit Bach in the sixteenth century on down to Johann Sebastian Bach and his talented sons in the eighteenth century, they are a colorful lot, and this period of history is certainly glamorous and thought-provoking. During the three centuries from 1550 to 1850, perhaps four hundred Bachs are known, almost all of whom achieved some prominence in the realm of music. The projected film, of course, need deal in detail with only the most outstanding ones, using the rest of the clan, who formed a sort of Bach guild, as a highly significant background. Besides featuring some rarely fine music, the picture could touch upon several subjects which would be of wide public interest, particularly the peculiarities of genius and the factors which apparently conspire to bring it about. There is not an equal instance of hereditary genius on record. The evolution of musical instruments should also be of public interest, being a subject which, to my knowledge, has never been dealt with in motion pictures. And how the sound technicians would relish this phase of the picture! Nor need the film be "highbrow." The most remarkable thing about the current Beethoven film is the way it humanizes the music of the great master, stripping it utterly of prejudicing academic associations, and giving the spectator new associations of a human kind. If this picture had been made in America, with box-office names, it could have had widespread public favor.

CLEVELAND HOLDS A FESTIVAL . . .

HOLLYWOOD, absorbed in the immediate problems of creating, publicizing, and distributing motion pictures, does not sufficiently appreciate the valuable work being done by individuals and groups in other parts of the country for artistic advancement of films and the widening of patronage. These objectives are being furthered by the Motion Picture Fes-

tival Week in Cleveland, to be held from May 6 to 13, sponsored by the Cleveland Cinema Club. Many agencies throughout the city, libraries, art museums, high schools, colleges, department stores, newspapers, radio, churches, and theatres, are to cooperate in staging exhibits and displays, in conducting publicity work, giving educational programs, and screening special pictures. The primary purposes of the festival are to focus public attention on motion pictures, stressing the standards which characterize good films and demonstrating the processes by which such pictures are made, thus developing more discriminating mass audiences.

May Become National Event . . .

SIMILAR festival is being held in Chicago, which A takes credit for having originated the idea. The plan has been heartily endorsed by the National Better Films Council, and an endeavor is being made to get other American cities to set aside a week for such a purpose next year, making the festival something of a national movement. Among the persons prominent in the field of visual education who are to be heard at Cleveland, are Doctor Alice Keliher of New York City and Dr. James Bliss of Western Reserve Cinema Laboratory. Hollywood producers are cooperating to the extent of sending original manuscripts, costumes worn in recent pictures, and other items of interest to theatre-goers. According to the cinema club's bulletin, efficiently edited by Miss Bertelle M. Lyttle, the organization was founded in 1917 "to study the art of Motion Pictures and its educational and moral effect, and to promote its best development." Mrs. Frank R. Anderson is chairman of the coming festival week.

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MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

NOVEL AS WELL AS NOTABLE...

CERVING old wine from a new bottle has been tried in Hollywood before, but there are always at least two ways of doing it, unconvincingly and convincingly. The latter requires more than a funnel. It takes artistic legerdemain if the precious fluid is not to lose flavor. The music score for Paramount's Stolen Heaven demonstrates that it can be done. Producer-Director Andrew Stone-credited also with the original story—was lucky to have had Phil Boutelje as musical advisor, Boris Morros watching over the production from his sanctum as general music director. I know he lent more than his usual interest. He cares greatly for the fact that the title reads "Music by Liszt, Grieg, Moszkowski, Johann Strauss, Chopin and Wagner." It is a novel and notable, recordsetting title. A great measure of musical completeness has been attained. Interpretation and recording are of the best. (Illusion was lost occasionally by unconvincing differentiation of sound volume in the piano solo to indicate change of distance.) Franchia White's voice not only ranks with the best, but the voice is dubbed in excellently. (She sings in place of Olympe Bradna. The latter opens her mouth at times wide enough to rival Martha Raye. It is the foremost fault of a non-vocalist trying to appear vocal.) In short, the picture should set a mark, musically and in terms of money. Bursts of preview applause confirms this belief.

It Can't Happen Anywhere . . .

THAT a picture so definitely and progressively musical as Stolen Heaven should contain quite obvious lapses from professional usage and likelihood is to be regretted. The fault lies with the story. It is impossible to discuss musical virtues without touching on story detail in the case of a production when action and music are interlinked so much and so closely. No artist of fame would entrust the renewal of his career to strangers, especially not on such light assurances. He would want a number of bookings. He would not be satisfied with staging a "comeback" before an audience of villagers in the garden of his forest home. Worse, he would not announce his choice of unimportant pieces—such as those chosen by him-with the air of an artist who has had a great career. If he had chosen a Liszt, a Tschaikowsky or a Grieg concerto, the whole idea of a professional rehabilitation would have sense. And the pianist of Andrew Stone's story is still in possession of his senses. Either of these concertos would have proven popular, and, which is more vital, would have justified the visual and aural use of an orchestra. I fear that a good many people, of all ages, will smile ironically when orchestra, and audience (!) join the "famous pianist" in Liszt's Liebestraum. They learn in high school that such a thing is unthinkable.

Fiction Plus Convention . . .

TERY ridiculous bits of fiction occurred in the French Beethoven film, as I pointed out in the April 2 Spectator. I am inclined to argue that there was still enough of the Beethoven as one believes him to have been, to accept this portrayal in a measure. In the case of Stolen Heaven the author of the screen story was not handicapped by the fullness or paucity, was not forced by the fitness or unfitness of detail in the life of a historic personage. Hence, it would have been easy to make a charming story professionally convincing, considering that factual history did in no way call for consideration. However, there is so much in the Stone music picture which singles it out as eminently musical that one should not inveigh too heavily against such brief scenes as when peasants are shown driving toward the pianist's house singing the melodies of these popular classics heard from the pianist. Again, chorus effects in themselves are well managed, from a choral and a recording standpoint.

Triple Use of Music . . .

MUSIC for the title is exceptionally good and, while dramatically exuberant, is not blatant. It commences with an improvisation in Wagnerian style and culminates in Wagner's famous "Ring" fanfares. The transition into the gayety of a beer garden, where singers and a little orchestra hold forth, comes easily. Andrew Stone has demonstrated here, as in later episodes, a technic by which music is treated not only integrally, but it serves part of the time as a principal entertainment factor per se, at other times music forms important parallel action, and third, it provides always good and on occasion dramatically significant under scoring. For that reason alone Stolen Heaven is a significant production and definitely establishes a dramatically sound method of action, dialogue and music treatment. It may well establish new ways and more interest for musical pictures. No doubt, Editor Beaton is dwelling on this feature of Stone's production style. Suffice therefore to add, that music interest is not only maintained, but heightened as the camera and dialogue microphone switch from the entertainers to some guests, again to a detective speaking to the owner of the restaurant. The asides of the singers, meant only for each other, and subtly covered from the audience in the picture by the continuous music, are cleverly managed.

Songs But Without Words . . .

APART from the quaint and appealing feature song, The Boys In the Band, by Frank Loesser and Manning Sherwin, used in the restaurant scene, there is a minimum of singing with words, although Franchia White's captivatingly beautiful and expressive voice is heard quite often, while Lewis Stone, acting the aged pianist in the story really convincing-

ly, plays pieces by Chopin, Grieg, Moszkowski, Liszt. Messrs. Stone, Morros and Boutelje again have shown excellent taste by letting the soprano vocalize in the manner of a wordless obligato. It comes rather naturally, for there is hardly a person who has not started to hum or sing a piece while someone else is playing it. This obligato style does not detract from the original because the listener is not offended by silly lyrics. Stone again employs music in the triple manner I have mentioned, and most effectively. Once or twice Chopin and, more so, the Grieg Nocturne, prove definite background music of emotional suspense, particularly in the setting for string quartet. All in all, notwithstanding unprofessional exaggerations in the music festival scenes, Stolen Heaven is rich in charm, of wide appeal and notably significant from a standpoint of music drama. Stone and his musical co-workers have proven that the technic of music drama is not the domain exclusively of gods and superhuman heroes.

KORNGOLD AND SHAKESPEARE . . .

UNDOUBTEDLY Erich Wolfgang Korngold—to U give his full name—would prefer to have his name mentioned second, but this paragraph being the expression of a wish, I must mention the Austrian first. To all accounts he has written a remarkable score for Warner's Robin Hood. In another week I shall be able to give my personal impressions. As it is, I know that this Viennese musician possesses a remarkable flair for writing music which expresses the atmosphere of "merrie old England." About ten years ago, he had to compose several scores of incidental music for a season of Shakespeare for the Vienna Volks Theatre, if I remember rightly. I know his Much Ado About Nothing suite, and it is as amusing as it is exquisite, and in the very spirit of the play. Korngold is a natural melodist. He has, what I would like to call, a distinct sense of situations. I must confess that the Anthony Adverse score disappointed me somewhat in that respect, but the picture had kaleidoscopic drawbacks. While it is always easier to make suggestions than to carry them out, yet I muster enough courage to propose that Warners make a Merry Wives of Windsor film and commission Korngold to produce a score based in part on the lovely music contained in Otto Nicolai's comic opera shaped after the Shakespeare play. Korngold will know where to strengthen Nicolai's instrumentation and where to insert music of his own.

LISZT THE GREAT LOVER . . .

ACCORDING to Louella Parsons, the MGM script department is preparing a story of the life of Franz Liszt. Leopold Stokowski is to impersonate the greatest of lovers among heroes of the piano and of tone poems. Greta Garbo is to play the female lead, of course, but there has been more than one such character in the life of the inflammable Franz. I am quite curious about the role MGM has in mind for Garbo. Between 1835 and 1839 Listz had a great affair with Countess Marie d'Agoult, who

wrote under the name of Daniel Stern, the result being three blessed events, including the famous Cosima, the wife of Wagner. Liszt's other attachment lasted much longer, in fact almost forty years. He met Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein in 1847 while concertizing in Russia. La Carolyn left her immensely wealthy but stupid prince, and moved to Weimar, where she and Liszt enjoyed the hospitality of the art-loving Duke. In the course of time Carolyn waxed imperious, wrote voluminously on history of the church, smoked cigars and put on weight. Liszt took a minor degree of holy orders and became known as the Abbé Liszt. Liszt and Marie d'Agoult lived for a while on the estate of George Sand, the great love of Chopin. The latter died two years after Liszt met Carolyn. So the Liszt film of MGM might continue long beyond the historical space of years considered by Columbia's story writer, Sidney Buchman, for the life of Chopin.

BELOW THE WASTE

By Don Quixote

T SHOULD be apparent even to the uninitiate, who know nothing of the intricacies of motion picture production, that the selection of stories is not only the first function in the making of films, but perhaps the most important single operation. To explain in barest outline the steps of operation whereby scripts, books, galley proofs are furnished to studio story departments by publishers, agents or the authors themselves, seems unnecessary. Yet in this very department, important as it is to the successful operation of a motion picture studio, waste and lack of foresight predominate. There has never been any thorough examination of this fundamental process in picture making. Rarely is proper consideration given to the method of story selection. In most instances Hollywood and New York offices have a department head and four to six assistants. In addition to these are the so-called "outside readers" who occasionally are given scripts to read at home. The haphazard selection and resultant inability of this vital personnel reflects the waste in this all-important department.

Reading Recession . . .

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER in its recent retrenchmen reputedly discharged some 2000 workers, smaller fry who earned from \$20 to \$75 a week. The saving, of course, was important and no doubt helped in balancing the budget. One of the first places where the axe fell was the reading department where inside and outside readers felt the pinch of Metro's retrenchment. However, book publishers and authors did not oblige Metro and cease publishing and writing books to even up with Metro's manpower slack. The wisdom in Metro's move is dubious. The number of books published before and after the Metro axe remains constant. The need for good vehicles remains constant. All factors remain

the same except Metro's present ability to cover the ground adequately, and intelligently read the amount of material necessary to discover enough stories for its sixty odd feature production program.

Calibre of Readers . . .

IT IS a notorious fact that many reading departments, even at this date, resemble more a concubinage than a reading force of intelligent and trained people. Those unfortunates whose faces and legs have little to commend them for camera purposes are relegated to the reading departments by promising producers, directors and executives. The reading department is jokingly referred to as the "Girl Friend Department." The implication is, of course, that reading and the selection of proper material requires little brains. Readers receive anywhere from \$25 to \$75 a week, the salary depending upon their physical rather than mental attainments. It seems a little off balance to consider that \$100,000 year producers are satisfied that \$25 a week underlings are sifting and sorting nascent screen material. The very lowness of salary presupposes workers of inferior talents. A man working for \$50 a week reading and selecting material will not be happy in the knowledge that his taste and judgment are the channels through which \$500,000 or \$1,000,000 are presently to flow.

Reader Honesty . . .

UNDER the present set-up every practical reader is an incipient author. It is only natural that he should be envious of the writer whose script he is reading and who will get, if he, the reader, so deems, \$3500 for his story. To the reader such a price represents a whole year's salary or more. Why not, therefore, increase his personal income by writing at home himself? And since ideas—good ideas—are always at a premium, what is there to prevent the reader from rejecting Love In the Rockies as unsuitable for motion picture production, but keeping for himself and for his future literary efforts the best in that story?

Outside Readers a Problem . . .

THERE was a time during the heyday of prosperity that outside readers received from Metro as much as six dollars for a single review. A 10% cut brought this down to \$5.40, which price now prevails. Universal pays the all-industry low of three dollars per review. The conclusions to be gleaned from these facts are almost too obvious to mention. An outside reader has to be good to be working. But his goodness depends on his speed as well as his judgment. An outside reader, for all the inside readers may think of him, is human and must live. And a man or woman must earn at least \$25 a week to live decently. This means he must have read from five to eight books in one week in order to earn enough to eat. The mechanics of writing a report necessitates his making from four to seven copies (depending on the company) of three separate items. First, a one-page synopsis of the script. Second, at least ten pages of plot in some detail. Third, a half-page of critical

judgment as to the merits of the work as motion picture material.

Speed and Neatness . . .

RKO goads its readers into preparing long synopses by offering awards. For synopses of fifteen type-written pages or over the reading fee is increased another few dollars. A late reading department head of Metro, Mrs. Lewton, used to insist, as her secretary would tell outside readers, not so much on context as on neatness. And many a script with erasure marks were slapped back for retyping. Neatness should be a essential part of any synopsis presentation, but not the extreme here mentioned. The outside reader, as mentioned, hurries to complete as many assignments as possible. His work is only intermittent at best. The necessary care each script deserves is not possible in the conveyor-belt spirit that pervades every reading department.

God and the Printed Word . . .

IT IS a notorious fact that reading department heads as well as readers have an unexplicable anathema for typewritten scripts. Without further investigation a script presented in this form is hardly suitable. The printed word, the prejudgment of another editor or publisher, is like the word of God to many reading heads. Typed scripts are relegated to the outsider, for the most part, whereas the printed word is the special province of the more fortunate insider. No doubt readability has much to do with this state of affairs. Nevertheless, the difference in spirit with which the two kinds of presentations are met is an ample indication of the business brains of the people who are hired.

Literary Shakedown . . .

LL these evidences of blundering stupidity are as A nothing compared to the nefarious system which permits reading heads to have more than a literary interest in the scripts presented them. It is well known by agents as well as authors that a number of reading department heads insist on a cut of everything that is sold. What this does to the search for quality scripts, the search for motion picture material, the resultant waste and loss of money as well as good available material, is obvious. Recently, a script that sold for \$60,000 netted the author all of \$14,000. Outstretched palms that reached from New York to Hollywood and back had glue on them. The interchange of department heads, not infrequent, suggests the magic circle in which these executives move. It seems to be a genial fraternity of people who make the rounds, year in and year out, between North Hollywood, Hollywood and Culver City, in the merry, merry maypole that costs the studios millions.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

SOME day we are going to have a producing organization which will become spectacularly successful by doing all the obvious things present producing organizations are leaving undone.

Page Fifteen

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by

RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD

of MABEL KEEFER

WORLD is too old-fashioned! . . . Jotted that down on my little scratch pad after having it suddenly borne in upon me that such is the case, and now I must examine the idea further. . . . To begin with, nations are doing the same old things they were doing thousands of years ago-warring upon each other, strong nations preying upon the weakand, by all that's good, they think they are forging ahead. The truth of the matter is, they are standing still while the scenery goes by. . . . The democracies of the world may consider themselves up to date, in that they have discarded the antiquated idea that might makes right. . . . We of the United States of America, though we are a long way from reaching our goal, have less exploitation and more realization of the responsibility of the strong for the weak, which means that, as a nation, we have progressed. But, as individuals—I wonder? There are so many old-fashioned ideas that we cling to, and—the irony of it—think that we are being up to date and sophisticated (that word's here again) in doing so. For instance, what could be more old-fashioned than the drinking parties which are a modern imitation of the revelries of the followers of Bacchus? And we worship idols galore! . . . When Bobbie Burns wrote "O wad some power the giftie gie us, to see oursels as ithers see us!" he could not know that one day there would be a medium by which humanity might view its idiosyncrasies. If he were living today he, perhaps, would ask that we might use that medium the medium of the screen—to keep us from slipping back into those quaint old-fashioned customs which we think are modern, because we have forgotten the past.

AFTER reading in Dr. Ussher's review of the music in The Life and Loves of Beethoven, that there is a vocal adaptation of the opening portion of the Moonlight Sonata, I have a vague feeling of something quite depressing having happened. . . . Words for the Moonlight Sonata—the spell of enchantment woven by the music, broken by words. To think that anyone should presume to put his own words to music that has an individual meaning for each listener.

SOME young men who pride themselves on being hard boiled, and who had no intention of going to see anything so foolish as Snow White, finally gave in to curiosity and went to see the picture. They succumbed to its charm unreservedly—and why? Because the picture is made from that good box-office recipe, which includes scenic beauty, wholesomeness, infectious music and infectious humor. Walt Disney

and his associates understand psychological effects and right values.

QUOTING LeRoy Prinz, dance director in chief for Paramount, the New York Herald Tribune says: "He contends that the supergargantuan musicals that have been rolling out of Hollywood will be replaced soon by new musicals of more intimate nature." Glory be!

IN DAYS of old, before knights were bold, the Caveman reigned supreme. He'd stalk his prey, and with the ladies he'd a way which really does seem quite extreme. If he loved a maiden fair, he'd take her by the hair-maybe hit her with a great big stick-and by all the stars above, with him she'd fall in love without his using any rhetoric. Chorus: In the good old Caveman days, when men had such winning ways, they needed no flowers, no taxis and things; no theatre tickets and no diamond rings. They didn't have to shave each day, or wear a derby hat, and the cane they always carried looked quite like a baseball bat. They didn't have to spend ten bucks their lady friends to feed when they took them for a little evening out—oh, no indeed! In the good old Caveman days, when men had such winning ways, they needed no flowers, no taxis and things; no theatre tickets and no diamond rings. Oh, it must have been just fine, not to have to have a "line", but just use those winning ways, in the good old Caveman days.

O^F HUMAN HEARTS, the M-G-M picture, is of the kind we can welcome heartily. The comments upon its theme are interesting. I learn that it is a splendid picture for Mother's Day because it shows so clearly what mothers will sacrifice for their children and how thankless children are. Also it is clearly intended to show that a conscientious minister is as fine in his ministry to souls as a doctor is to bodies. Again, it is a wonderful lesson to mothers not to sacrifice for their children lest it make them selfish. Or, is it a historic drama, showing life and ideals of a short century ago, and thus offering an explanation of some of the practices of today which are greatly at variance with those of that time? I am sorry that M-G-M and Clarence Brown did not portray a more natural town in which the minister and his family could live. There are only two boys and one girl as children, no school, no people between fifteen and forty, yet it is a frontier town.

A SMILE such as adagio dancers wear when the orchestra misses its cue.—Weare Holbrook. Isn't that descriptive?

ONE of the janitors in our office building has a habit of going through the hallways making a soft cooing sound—as if he were saying, "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"—and it sometimes makes me vaguely uneasy, in that it seems to find an echo in my brain. . . . I wonder?

JOAN BLONDELL

IN

"There's Always a Woman"

A COLUMBIA PICTURE

"There's Always a Woman" is a sure-fire hit. It's a triumph for Joan Blondell.—Los Angeles Examiner.

Melvyn Douglas

IN

"There's Always a Woman"

A COLUMBIA PICTURE



Melvyn Douglas plays his part with a degree of skill which makes us agree that no one else possibly could have been such a perfect mate for Joan.—Welford Beaton, Hollywood Spectator.



Hollywood 10 cents SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—May 21, 1938

Vol. 13-No. 6

Call Out The Old Guard!

In the Present Box-Office Crisis it Might
Help if People Trained in Silent
Days Were Called in to Apply
Microphone Intelligently



Bruno Ussher Discusses Musical Scores From the Standpoint of the Box-Office



COCOANUT GROVE * THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO * GOLD DIGGERS IN PARIS

NEW ADVENTURES OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM

Are You Doing Your Full Share?

Since the reorganization of the Motion Picture Relief Fund, the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee are composed of members of the Screen Directors, Writers, and Actors' Guilds. together with Producers and representatives of the Make-up Artists, Film Editors, Publicity Group, and Art Directors.

It is the hope of all that through hard, unselfish work and efficient management this great organization which belongs to the entire industry may be able to function one hundred per cent in relieving the distress of our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

JEAN HERSHOLT, President
RALPH MORGAN, Chairman
Executive Committee



Call Out the Old Guard . . .

RECENTLY Daily Variety had this to say: "Rapidly declining picture grosses, in some instances reaching forty to fifty per cent below all-time depression day lows, have exhibitors here and elsewhere jittery and frantically trying to devise ways and means to combat the serious situation which has developed."

Everything which has happened to pictures in the last decade was predicted by the Spectator long in advance of its happening. That is a matter of record. The predictions were not mere guesses. They were based on reasoning from the

standpoint of film facts.

ANYONE with even elemental knowledge of people, pictures, and sound business principles, could see that the film industry was riding to a fall. The Spectator saw it and warned of it so repeatedly that it grew tired of the repetition. In several issues of recent dates it analysed the business situation of the industry and suggested methods by which it could be made more stable.

Only the inherent strength of the screen as a medium of entertainment has enabled it to survive the grossly ignorant management it has received, but, as Variety indicates, its resistance is waning, its situation becoming desperate.

Jittery exhibitors can do nothing about it. The remedy must be applied at the source of the trouble—the picture producing plants in Holly-

wood.

MPROVMENT in general business conditions will have but a temporary revivifying effect on box-office grosses. When the depression of the early thirties was at its heighth, the Spectator made the same statement and later events have proven its soundness.

We repeat what we have said scores of times—that there is not a controlling producer in a Hollywood studio who has the remotest concep-

tion of what a real motion picture is—that if the automobile industry were in such ignorant hands no car would keep running for a thousand miles.

Yet to make a good box-office picture is a simple process, but not a process so simple that simpletons can apply it. Knowledge of the fundamentals of the medium is essential.

PICTURE ignorance has had its day. Knowledge must supplant it if conditions are to be improved. In schools and colleges all over the country there are students who know more about the fundamentals of screen entertainment than is known by the producers who control the output of Hollywood studios. The Spectator, which is used as a textbook for hundreds of these Motion Picture Appreciation classes, is playing its part in spreading picture knowledge, but exhibitors can not wait for the students to grow up and take command.

THE present producers must apply the remedy, must give the business financial stability. That means they must acquire knowledge of the business they are in. As a starting point I would suggest their reading of the Spectators of April twenty-three, April thirty, May seven. That at least should start them thinking.

If studio executives would think less of horse races and more of their jobs, less of sporting events and more of the nature of their business, a few among them might devise ways to cope with the present crisis. The intelligent ones might profit by remembering that in the silent days the picture business was a rather steady one, that its very steadiness led to its downfall before the microphone came along to revive it.

URNING out box-office successes in the silent days became such a routine matter that executives grew careless and gave little thought to their product. Box-offices reflected the carelessness, and while the executives sat around and blinked at one another in complete ignorance of the reason for what was happening to the film industry, the sound device came along and with its advent they ceased thinking entirely, and since then have not thought in terms of the business they are in.

What Hollywood needs now is what it needed but did not get when talking pictures first were made possible—the application of the new element in a manner to strengthen a form of entertainment which already had proven its power to build a gigantic industry. Instead of proceeding in that manner, Hollywood chucked its old business overboard and went into a new one. It now is paying the price of its ignorance and will continue to pay it until intelligence supplants the ignorance.

THERE are available some Hollywood brains which retain knowledge gained in making silent pictures. It is not too late yet to relegate the microphone to its proper place as a medium of expression, to tell stories more with the camera than with sound machinery. If a producer with long experience in the silent era—Ben Schulberg, for instance—were to be called back into service, he could make the kind of pictures exhibitors need to restore prosperity to their business.

EVENTS have proven that straight talking pictures will not hold the audience the industry needs for its support. Silent pictures did. Then what we want are producers who know how to make silent pictures and are sufficiently familiar with the microphone to use it to make their talkies even better box-office than the silent pictures used to be. Ben Schulberg comes to mind because of his long service before sound came and his subsequent experience with it.

The sound device came as a great boon to the screen. It has been used as a weapon which has been battering the life out of it.

Ignorance has had its day!
It is time to call out the Old Guard!

DOUGS, SENIOR AND JUNIOR . . .

ONE of the wisest screen stars I know is Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. When I met him first about twenty years ago, he assured me he was not an actor, that all he knew was how to leap over things and climb ivy-clad walls, and that when he grew too old to do that he was going to quit. And that is what Doug has done. Not for him was the des-

perate hanging on to fading glory. As his screen performances so largely engaged only his body, he occupied his head with thoughts of business with the result that when he withdrew from public gaze, his pockets were well stuffed with money and to Doug, Jr., he left the perpetuation of the name. Only one complete Fairbanks has a place in screen history, the father figuring from the neck down and the son from the neck up. It will not be long until young Doug is recognized as one of the really brilliant screen actors.

WE REPLY TO A CORRESPONDENT . . .

CORRESPONDENT takes me to task for re-A ferring in the last Spectator to Shirley Temple as still "at the head of the box-office list," while the figures compiled by National Box-Office Digest and published in its annual number showed Shirley's place to be in the twenties. I have no quarrel with the Digest's figures or its way of figuring, but before we can accept its box-office ratings as reflecting the true standing of players, we must take into consideration the manner in which they are arrived at. The range of Digest's compilations necessarily must be limited to the box-office figures available to it, and those available, while considerable, are by no means sufficiently comprehensive to reflect the true standing of players throughout the world. The great majority of picture houses do not report their box-office earnings, the smaller houses, which outnumber the big ones perhaps one hundred to one, not making box-office reports which can be used in establishing ratings. Digest gets what figures it can and rates the players accordingly. Those who during the period it covers happened to be lucky enough to appear in pictures which did big business in key city houses which make public their box-office takes, of necessity must get top rating in Digest's list.

Rating Star Popularity . . .

THE price of admission also is a factor in rating the popularity of players. If one person pays sixty cents to see Player A on the screen of a city house, and three people pay fifteen cents each to see Player B in a village theatre, the gross intake would place A's popularity over B's in the ratio of sixty to forty-five; but is not a player whom three people pay to see, more popular than another whom only one person pays to see? In any event, the sixty cents return is made public and the forty-five cents return is not, which places B in the position of getting no credit for drawing three customers while A was drawing one. And another factor we must take into account is that a thousand-dollar-week in the majority of houses is much greater than a sixty-thousand-dollar-week in the Radio City Music Hall. Only by an answer from the majority of big and little exhibitors to one question can the true box-office rating of players be established: "Which star do your patrons like most?" That removes the hazard of figures. If box-office earnings be the only guide, Joe Doakes, in a supporting role in a picture which turns out to be a tremendous success, could get higher rating than Gary Cooper if he happened to be in one which flopped.

Herald's Approach Has Merit . . .

"HE nearest approach to a really accurate estimate of the box-office strength of players is that compiled each year by Motion Picture Herald. The Herald's conclusions are not based on box-office grosses; its question is one which exhibitors have latitude in answering and which has the additional advantage of being one which all of them can answer accurately: "What ten players drew the greatest number of patrons to your theatre?" We get the answer to that in people, not in dollars, and without doubt the answer is influenced as much by the patrons' liking for a given player as by the earnings of the players' pictures. For three years Shirley Temple has headed the Herald's list of box-office stars, winning last year by a wide margin, and to lend strength to the soundness of my method of reasoning is the fact that Shirley did not appear in Film Daily's list of the ten best box-office pictures of the year. And without adding up box-office figures or summarizing exhibitor's lists of favorites, but by approaching the matter as a purely mental problem, we cannot escape the conclusion that Shirley Temple must be the filmdom's best boxoffice bet. She is the greatest actress on the screen and is the only player of either sex who has universal appeal, who can delight both the youngest children and their grandparents, and all the ages which come between. If the correspondent to whom I referred at the opening of these remarks, challenges the accuracy of that conclusion, will he please tell me what other player has appeal as universal as that of Shir-ley? The only thing which jeopardizes her standing at the head of the box-office list for years to come, is Darryl Zanuck's lack of knowledge of what to do to keep her there. She has got where she is in spite of him-not by virtue of his understanding of the kind of pictures in which she should appear.

LESLIE HOWARD SPEAKING . . .

VER in London Leslie Howard is having things to say about motion pictures. Among the interesting things he said for publication in Film Weekly, one of England's most enterprising and entertaining picture publications, we find the following: "Let it be understood from the beginning that films attract me more than anything else on earth—more than writing, painting or even the theatre. Were I not so attracted by them I should have got out of the racket years ago, and most certainly shouldn't, at the moment, be considering putting back into various British film projects much of the money which I have earned starring in pictures. Films are the most fascinating form of expression on earth. Their potentialities are limitless. What troubles me is to see this young industry corrupted by big business and held

in check by its own bogus artistic standards. I think you will agree that anyone genuinely interested in the rational development of the film industry can scarcely be blamed for taking every opportunity of exposing its follies.... An actor will only achieve worthwhile results when he forgets his own ego and realizes that he is merely a cog in a machine—of no more importance than the director, the scenarist, cameraman or lighting expert. The film industry makes it very difficult for even its genuine actors to approach their work in the right spirit. The adulation which is extended to anyone who appears in pictures tends to puff them up with big ideas of their own importance. Publicity sheets shriek one's capabilities and gifts to the skies until one almost believes them.'

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

HUGE bumble bee, a Zeppelin of his species, is A zooming among the locust blossoms just above my head. . . . Sometime ago I wrote of a plant in the flower garden which I had tended carefully, named Throgmorton, and which had turned out to be a weed; I libeled Throgmorton; he has turned out to be a bush of celery. . . . It does not take me long to read the daily papers as I skip all the unpleasant stories they carry. . . . I have put one over on the sun; there are three identical chairs on the lawn; one of them is in the sun when I start my three hours of daily writing—this morning at 7:15 -when the sun gets too hot, I move to the semishade of chair number two, and when I begin to blister there I seek the complete shade provided by number three. . . . Gene Autry thanked me for a review I had given one of his pictures; told me the president of Sears-Roebuck had mailed him from Chicago the Spectator containing it; you can get from Sears-Roebuck practically anything you want. . . As far as I know I am the only man in the world growing Throgmorton celery. . . . Jimmie Fidler, with whose radio broadcasts I quarrel quite frequently, gave me the name of his shirtmaker, a woman who also makes slacks, and as soon as I can afford it I will become one of her customers and vie with Jimmie in natiness. . . . A neighbor's cat made use of one of our outbuildings and presented us with a litter of kittens, much to the amazement of the Spaniel and the Peke; one of the litter we will keep in payment for board and lodging for the lot; we have named ours Percival. . . . A neighbor just phoned that from her front porch she could see the Peke having a fit in our driveway; I rushed out and found her, her four paws in the air, luxuriously scratching her back on the gravel. . . . I have decided that no part of Throgmorton will be eaten; am curious to see what happens to a celery bush when it is left in undisturbed possession of life and limb.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

SOMEWHAT BETTER THAN MOST . . .

• COCOANUT GROVE: Paramount: producer, George M. Arthur; director, Alfred Santell; assistant director, Roland Asher; original story and screen play by Sy Bartlett and Olive Cooper; photographed by Leo Tover, A.S.C.; art direction by Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; edited by Hugh Bennett; sound recording, Harry Mills and Don Johnson; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman; costumes, Edith Head; musical direction, Boris Morros; musical advisor, Arthur Franklin. Cast: Fred MacMurray, Harriet Hilliard, The Yacht Club Boys, Ben Blue, Eve Arden, Billy Lee, Rufe Davis, Harry Owens, Dorothy Howe, George Walcott, Red Stanley, Roy Gordon.

COMEWHAT more entertaining than others of the Sort but not so much so that it will give the boxoffice the shot in the arm it needs so badly. Producers cannot go on indefinitely doing the same thing over and over again and hope to hold the interest of the paying customers. If Cocoanut Grove were the first musical comedy film to appear on any screen, it would be a sensational success and would be a milestone in screen history. It has to its credit many things of outstanding merit, excellent music, clever comedy and a very fine production, but we have seen so many of which this one is but a variation, that we view it with a "Well, what of it?" feeling. It was not shown the press to the best advantage, the sound equipment in the Ambassador Hotel Theatre being unequal to the task of doing justice to either dialogue or score. The comfortable seats in the back of the house where the sound would be less irritating were reserved for Paramount studio people and their friends, and the reviewers, whose opinions mean so much to exhibitors showing the picture, were herded down front to sit in hard seats and get the full blast from the screen. Even feeding the reviewers in the Grove after the preview could not get the noise out of their minds.

Why Girl Leaves Boy . . .

WERE my problem at the moment one of telling you my reaction to the film at the time of viewing it, I would state that I did not enjoy it, but given a comfortable seat in a house with good sound equipment, I think you would derive considerable entertainment from it if you still have a taste for pictures of its class. The story is a frail one which could not happen, but that is not a demerit. It provides places for musical and comedy interpolations which will please you. The inevitable romance is of standard variety. Boy meets girl, they fall in love, girl gets mad at boy, walks out, he chases her, brings her back-clinch. The girl's reason for getting mad is a tremendous one-she sees him speaking to another girl. An awful thing like that is enough to wreck any romance. The rest of the story gives a semblance of logic to the inclusion of the specialty numbers, and for that credit goes to the writers, Sy Bartlett and Olive Cooper. Alfred Santell's direction keeps things moving at a brisk pace, but I wish he had been able to make some of his players pipe down

when reading lines. In several scenes it is made obvious that we are listening to actors spouting dialogue and not to members of an orchestra discussing their hard luck. At times the vocal din is terrific.

Cast a Capable One . . .

THE cast gives satisfaction. Fred MacMurray is raised to star status in the opening title, and his raised to star status in the opening title, and his musical attainments coupled with his easy and convincing acting technique prove his right to such distinction. Harriet Hilliard was an ideal choice as the other half of the romance and contributed a great deal to the entertainment the picture will provide. The Yacht Club Boys appear to better advantage than ever before. I always have liked them. To my way of thinking Ben Blue is one of the cleverest comedians on the screen. Teamed here with Eve Arden, he is responsible for many laughs, but not as many as would have come his way without her valuable assistance. Billy Lee, child actor, scores something in the nature of a triumph with his expert drumming. George Walcott plays convincingly a heavy role, Red Stanley proves adroit as a comedian, and Harry Owens shows he can act as well as lead an orchestra. Rufe Davis, Dorothy Howe and Roy Gordon round out the capable cast. Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick designed a highly impressive production and Leo Tover made a good job of the photography.

LIFE IN THE OLD BODY . . .

● THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO; a Reliance picture; released through United Artists; produced by Edward Small; directed by Rowland V. Lee; story by Alexandre Dumas; screen play and dialogue by Philip Dunn, Dan Totheroh and Rowland V. Lee; photographed by Peverell Marley. Cast: Robert Donat, Elissa Landi, Louis Calhern, Sidney Blackmer, Raymond Walburn, O. P. Heggie, Georgia Caine, Walter Walker, Lawrence Grant, Luis Alberni, Irene Hervey, Douglas Walton, Juliette Compton, Clarence Wilson, Eleanor Phelps, Ferdinand Munier, Holmes Herbert, Paul Irving, Mitchell Lewis, Clarence Muse, Lionel Belmore, Wilfred Lucas, Tom Rickette, Edward Keane, Sydney Jarvis, Desmond Roberts, Alphonse Martell, Russell Powell, Wallace Albright, William Farnum.

WHEN this picture was previewed in the fall of 1934 I enjoyed it as entertainment and in my review praised it highly. When I viewed it last week I enjoyed it more than I did the first time. It is a stirring, well made drama of revenge, with story appeal to our elemental emotions and fashioned after the dramatic pattern which has pleased audiences since the theatre was born—the hero emerges tri-

> Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. OPTOMETRIST

1725 North Highland Avenue Hollywood, California HEmpstead 8438

umphantly and the villains get theirs, good and plenty. But it is not a slap-dash melodrama; it is a polite affair, dressed with magnificence, has a cast of distinction, was directed brilliantly. Technically, it shows its age a little, comparison with present pictures indicating the advance that has been made in lighting and the quality of film. But that is something only for Hollywood to note; what counts more is that The Count of Monte Cristo will stir the emotions of today's audiences as powerfully as it did those of yesterday.

Lee's Direction Masterly . . .

ONE thing I was interested in noting was that Rowland Lee, the director, four years ago had a more intelligent grasp of the manner in which dialogue should be recorded than the majority of directors have now. His people speak in tones to match the mood of scenes and there is loud talking only when the scenes demand it. The picture is a big one, mounted on a huge scale and having many elaborate sets, but Lee never permits the story to lose itself in its pictorial grandeur. It took expert direction to preserve intact the thread of a narrative with so many ramifications, one which is composed of three separate wrongs to be avenged and a romance which spans the score of years the action covers; but Lee never permits it to become involved or hard to follow. In a masterly way he builds suspense until it grips the audience and keeps it tense. We have been taught to know the hero always emerges triumphantly, but that does not lessen our apprehension for his safety when he is facing great odds or permit us to breathe easily until he is out of danger.

Old Favorites In Cast . . .

THERE apparently is no reason why the box-office I should not demonstrate the wisdom of the reissue of this success of four years ago. Its appeal is fundamental, as fresh today as when the picture was made. Many of those who saw it when it first was shown will want to see it again, and each of the passing years has created a new audience which has not seen it. In the cast are players whom old audiences will be glad to see again, who would be seen more frequently if our producers had more intelligence. Pleasant memories are evoked by the presence in the cast of Georgia Caine, O. P. Heggie, Lawrence Grant, Holmes Herbert, Mitchell Lewis, Clarence Muse, Lionel Belmore, Wilfred Lucas, Tom Richette, Alphonse Martell and William Farnum. The late O. P. Heggie's performance is a beautiful bit of work. Donat's performance will rate, I believe, as the greatest he has given the screen. As the three villains, Louis Calhern, Sidney Blackmer and Raymond Walburn are impressive. I was interested in the appearance of Irene Hervey who shares a romance with Douglas Walton. The charm of her personality, the sweetness and innocence of youth, contribute a nice touch. Edward Small, producer of the picture, made a great job of a great story. I hope his re-issue will be so successful that we will be shown

again some of the productions which now are but pleasant screen memories.

IS NICE IN SPOTS . . .

 GOLD DIGGERS IN PARIS; Warners picture and release; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis: associate producer, Sam Bischoff: screen play by Earl Baldwin and Warren Duff: story by Jerry Wald, Richard Macaulay and Maurice Leo; from an idea by Jerry Horwin and James Seymour; directed by Ray Enright: dialogue director, Gene Lewis; musical numbers created and directed by Busby Berkeley; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; photography by Sol Polito; musical numbers photographed by George Barnes; music and lyrics by Harry Warren, Al Dubin and Johnny Mercer; assistant director, Jesse Hibbs; film editor, George Amy; sound by C. A. Riggs and David Forrest; art director, Robert Haas; gowns by Howard Shoup; orchestral arrangements by Ray Heindorf. Cast: Rudy Vallee, Rosemary Lane, Hugh Herbert, Allen Jenkins, Gloria Dickson, Melville Cooper, Mabel Todd, Fritz Feld, Ed Brophy, Curt Bois, Victor Kilian, George Renevant, Armand Kaliz, Maurice Cass, Eddie Anderson, Rosella Towne, Janet Shaw, Carole Landis, Peggy Moran, Diana Lewis, Lois Lindsay, Poppy Wilde and the Schnickelfritz

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

IF ONLY there were a stage in the production of I screen musicals comparable to the Atlantic City period of stage productions, where unsatisfactory bits could be taken out and stronger material substituted. and the whole given a careful polish, many film musicals which now reach the screen as so-so productions might be primped into something exceptional. But, alas, as I have pointed out before, the screen has no such stage in its production process. Some pruning and polishing can be done after previews, especially when budgets allow for a few retakes, but, by and large, things have to be right the first time. Gold Diggers In Paris is a smart show in many ways. It has numerous touches of originality and wit, good pace, a measure of glitter, and it reflects expert direction. But for all that, there are stretches of the film comprised of such fustian, and the story itself is such a propped-up thing, that the musical can scarcely be rated as an outstanding film.

Direction Is Imaginative . . .

RAY ENRIGHT has directed the picture with a good deal of imagination. The action is rapid, the characters are sharply drawn, their movements varied and sure and their comedy lines well timed and punctuated. A commendable feature of Enright's direction is the fine variety with which he uses the camera. One of Rudy Vallee's numbers is caught with a tilting shot, the singer moving along the railing of a ship, above the camera—really quite effective. "Pans," "dollies," "booms," and other shots

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are generously employed by Enright. In fact, as I recall, he always endeavors to translate his story into visual action when he can, but the story material is based on the convention of stage musicals, whereby one group talks, then another group talks, and then somebody sings or dances. But it is all done on a fine scale, Samuel Bischoff ably demonstrating his skill as a producer and Busby Berkeley contributing some of the dance ensembles for which he is noted.

Writers Generously Used . . .

 $\mathbf{r}ROM$ the inception of the story idea to the screen play version, seven writing gentlemen had a hand in the opus, so it is rather remarkable that the opus has as much coherency and sense as it has. The plot has to do with a nitwit Frenchman's being commissioned by directors of the Paris Exposition to come to America and sign the American Academy Ballet to take part in a dancing contest with representatives of other nations at the exposition. The Frenchman signs a contract with the managers of the almost-bankrupt Club Bali, confusing it with the ballet organization, "as might be expected," so the publicity department synopsis strategically assures one. In Paris the night-clubbers are exposed and sought by the police, but worm their way out of the dilemma and win the dance prize after all. The anemic yarn is kept on its feet and moving only through large injections of coincidence, and by much pushing and pulling on the part of director and cast. The finale, which wins the prize, is not a ballet at all, but a conventional song and dance number. Ridiculed as hyper-aesthetic loons are the real ballet group, especially its star. No one longer looks to the present crop of picture moguls to do much to raise the level of mass culture, but they might at least refrain from ridiculing cultural institutions.

Crooner Croons Agreeably . . .

DUDY VALLEE is altogether acceptable as a filmu $m{\kappa}$ sical lead man. His diction and his speaking voice are pleasant, he has poise, and in some shots he is indeed a handsome fellow. As a singer, his work is quite agreeable, if one forgets momentarily about Caruso. In his role he lacks pliancy, but this shortcoming is partly made up for by some impersonations he gives, one of Chevalier, the other of our own Franklin Roosevelt, the latter coming as a surprise and quite tickling the preview audience. Vallee has a decided flair for this sort of thing. Rosemary Lane came through with a creditable performance and sings pleasantly. Hugh Herbert, the "Wu! Wu!" man, is in good Wu-Wuing form, and Gloria Dickson is clever, especially in her subtle moments, before she is required to scream so much. Allen Jenkins, Melville Cooper, Mabel Todd, Fritz Feld, Curt Bois were other outstanding players. A talking dog, made articulate through ventriloquism, was a good gag and could have been played up more.

We Are Deafened . . .

A MISTAKE in showmanship was the featuring of the six-piece Schnickelfritz Band, which I am informed Vallee discovered in a Mid-Western night

club. They may be great stuff in a night club, but they are a total loss on the screen, featuring as they do almost pure, unmitigated noise. The publicity bulletin boasts that they used 78 different "instruments," including auto sirens, train whistles, old automobile rims and conch shells. The effect was made all the more aggravating by the man at the Warner's Theatre sound panel, who stepped up the noise until it was nearly agonizing. At one sudden blast I flinched and let out a mild curse, which caused the man at my side, maybe the studio sound man, to eye me with disapproval; and I eyed him back with reciprocal disapproval; and all the time the blasts kept flaying us. I bet when the Schnickelfritz Band is heard through the country there will be a new outburst of strikes and wife beatings. In fact, I wouldn't doubt at all that the ennervating effects of abused sound apparatus has a good deal to do with world chaos. At any rate, such noise as this is driving people from picture theatres. The choral effects in the film were almost as deafening.

White Dots This Time . . .

O^F THE music, Day-Dreaming, by Harry Warren and Johnny Mercer struck my fancy most forcibly. The other tunes, by Warren and Dubin, are sufficiently tuneful, some having catchy lyrics. Leo F. Forbstein has handled the the orchestral effects with his customary thorough musicianship. A praiseworthy feature of the picture is that it has background music for large portions of the action. Some process shots are well handled, particularly scenes with lighted fountains glowing behind the players. Sol Polito did the general photography, with George Barnes filming the musical numbers, which were made more interesting by unusual camera angles. After the picture was completed, at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars, someone was authorized to put big, distracting white dots onto the film, so that men in the projection booths could know when to change reels. The white dots are even more noticeable than the usual dark ones. Of all the inanities of our loony town, this practice of marring valuable film is one of the most incomprehensible.

ROVER BOYS IN REVOLUTION ...

• NEW ADVENTURES OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL: a London film; director, Hans Schwartz; producer, Arnold Presburger; story, Baroness Orczy; costumes, Rene Hubert. The cast: Barry Barnes, Sophie Stewart, Margaretta Scott, James Mason, Francis Lister, Anthony Bushell, Patrick Barr, David Tree, John Counsell.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

THE New Adventures of those deuced clever fellows, Scarlet Pimpernel and Alexander Korda, are unfortunately unworthy successors of the Leslie Howard triumph. Mr. Korda has not spared expense, and there are production values galore. There is more here on which to feast the eyes than Lloyds of London and the House of Rothschild combined. Nevertheless, the current adventures of the saviour of la noblesse francaise did not seem to ring true. His exploits, his disguises, his ruses and his hairbreadth

escapes did not have the finesse and the suspense present in the earlier picture. Baroness Orczy's story does not have the quality in this case that the first one did. And it seemed as if the characters raced through their parts in an attempt to bring the picture in on schedule.

Story Has No Soul...

NOT that the greatest care is not in evidence. For judging by the lavish costumes alone the picture must have cost a pretty Bank of England penny. But the story has no soul. Sir Percy Blakeny's return to France to save his wife, and inadvertently the lives of a few of the nobility, did not seem real. None of the characters seemed real. Least of all Robespierre, the tyrant of the celebrated French Terror. Francis Lister's Chauveline, head of the Secret Police, was too obviously villainous. The Tallien created by James Mason was historically inaccurate, if I remember my Carlyle. In the present instance he is depicted as a weak, vacillating young man, torn between the love of an actress and his duty as a guardian of liberty. Actually, he was quite a figure who finally ended the terror practically single-handed.

Pimpernel's Men...

THERE was never a feeling of imminent danger, ever present in the Leslie Howard version, this perhaps for the reason that the Pimpernel's men, aside from being in the right place at the right time for the right reason, seemed to be on an Eton schoolboy's holiday. Although danger was ever present, and death and the guillotine but a few yards away, they toasted His Majesty, the King, in the best light opera tradition. Their manifold disguises, and the ease with which they slipped through the fingers of their French pursuers made the story not a little unbelieveable. There are several scenes in the picture which deserve the highest commendation. The handling of the Tribunal scene and the downfall of Robespierre was masterful. The Guillotine-Place de la Concorde sequences were also well handled, as was the Brighton cricket scene. There is pageant, indeed, but not the warmth and sincerity so needed to make a story of this kind real.

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JENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON says: "There H is only one way to improve the taste of a nation. It cannot be done in a hurry and it cannot be done by force. It can only be accomplished by exposing the people patiently and systematically and continually to that which is truly 'good'-to that which is truly 'noble' in the sense that it deserves to be known. . . . Not that, in the matter of taste, we can expect everybody to like something merely because we say so. That is impossible and furthermore not necessary." Mr. van Loon then stresses the fact that exposing people "just as much as possible to that which is a true product of divine inspiration and honest human craftsmanship," often leads to their making a good choice for themselves, and because they have done so "out of their own volition, it will be a lasting one." In a recent Spectator, Bert Harlen, speaking of screen art, said: "No art medium in the past has offered so many properties which could be moulded into an artistic whole by the creative artist." And surely no medium in the past has offered such opportunity for "exposing the people" to the ideas and ideals that make for the progress of mankind, as that which the screen offers. The creative artist who uses this medium as a sounding board, as he plays upon the heartstrings of the world, is using an instrument of unlimited and unequaled power.

WONDER if in these times of stress, Dame Fortune might knock at my door, if of wishbone I had just a little bit less, and of backbone a great deal more?

HER JUNGLE LOVE is billed at one of our local theatres, but I have no desire to see it. However, I feel somewhat indebted to Paramount because I have been entertained by reading two reviews of the picture—that of Editor Beaton, in the Spectator, and Howard Barnes, in the New York Herald Tribune. I wore a broad grin while reading them—very broad in the case of the Spectator—and, as a grin pulls up the corners of one's mouth, automatically it becomes a beauty treatment; therefore my feeling of indebtedness to Paramount.

MISSED seeing Stolen Heaven. It was shown in this town before the Spectator carrying the preview arrived, and I knew nothing about the good music in the picture until a friend told me how fine it was. So, once more I ponder the enigma of motion picture advertising. The custom seems to be, ballyhoo about nothing, but when there really is something the public should be told about, silence reigns supreme. Might one be permitted to suggest to pro-

ducers and exhibitors that this is not a case where silence is golden, nor is it silvern? It is just plain box-office minus.

MOST criticism of the film industry is, I think, the result of a desire to have screen art take its rightful place with the other great arts. And, because there have been truly great screen presentations, one criticises with a sort of "this hurts me more than it hurts you" feeling.

TWO most gratifying musical moments in the Girl of the Golden West: Jeanette MacDonald singing with the piccolo. (It was a piccolo, wasn't it? At times the tone quality sounded more like the lower voiced flute.) And Nelson Eddy humming, and strumming a guitar. We should have more of that sort of thing in musical pictures, and less concert work.

BERT HARLEN, of the Spectator, quoted Frank S. Nugent, of the New York Times, who quotes Will Hays (hope I can find my way back) as saying, in effect, that it is important to bring new customers to the motion picture theatre. That wouldn't mean that the film industry might do something to attract an entirely new type of theatre patron, would it? For instance, it wouldn't cut down its output of musical shorts depicting floor shows in night clubs, and substitute a few embodying artistic merit as to music, artists, directing, wit and humor—would it? Could it, by any chance, be brought to consider the suggestion that the majority of the very people it seeks to attract by the current type of musical short, are spending their evenings in night clubs where they get the dance bands and floor shows at first hand, and not at the motion picture theatres? And could it be persuaded to plan feature pictures and musical shorts that would complement each other for an evening's entertainment—doing away with the double-feature program? In short, would it be possible to convince the industry that it has made a mistake in neglecting a certain type of potential motion picture patron, and that it would be well—box-officially speaking—to do a little courting in that direction?

A FIVE-YEAR-OLD miss speaking: "It's not right to say 'ain't', is it? But it's all right to say 'isn't', ain't it?"

ONE of the most fragrant poems I have ever read is Helen Mitchel's Inebriant, which has to do with a lemon tree that, I assume, is in her yard. . . . And that gives me an idea! The next time I am handed a lemon, instead of making lemonade—this is, trying to—as I have been wont to do, I shall plant the seeds and have a lemon tree of my own—maybe.

THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE prints an excerpt from a letter written by one of its writers: "Every story I ever wrote for The American I promptly sold

for pictures. And every story I ever wrote directly for pictures I never sold to pictures, nor anybody. Do you suppose the movie boys like to lean a wee bit on your judgment, Mr. Editor?" What do you make of it, Watson? No, no! You are wrong! Nothing so simple as that! As a matter of fact, the answer is much too complicated for the average mind to grasp. Here we have on one hand—well, whatever it is we have on one hand, and on the other hand—are you following me, Watson? And one always must take into consideration the variables and—quite right, my dear Watson! As you say, we'd better have a spot of lunch before we go into this matter any further.

WISH I knew where I could get me some mirth—I could use plenty of it tonight. Unfortunately, the pictures being shown are either of the maudlin "melerdramer" type, or the slapstick hilarity variety, and what I crave is honest-to-goodness bubbling mirth, that will leave me feeling like a new man.

READ a poem the other day about a boy who was walking in the woods and heard the tall pine trees talking to each other. That night he played all that they had said, on his fiddle. . . . I wish all musical backgrounds for outdoor screen scenes would do that—tell us what is being said by forests, streams, ocean waves, mountains, or whatever is being depicted—and do it in such a manner that there would be no consciousness of the instruments that were doing the interpreting.

 A^{SI} passed two little girls on the street, one said to the other, "Oh, no, that's my uncle's brother!"

COROT, the great landscape-painter, did not receive the recognition due him until he was approaching his seventy-fifth year. In fact, it is said that his skill was not at its highest until he was seventy-one years of age. . . . Maybe there still is a chance for some of us who seem to be getting nowhere fast.

A GROUP of merchants in this small New York State town is considering the formation of a Merchant's Protective Association. The purpose of such an organization would be to correct the many evils that creep into advertising, such as misleading statements and exaggerated claims made in merchants' advertising occasionally, breaking down the morale of the shopping public. Now, if the film industry would take this as an indication that a "cycle" of restrained and reliable advertising is approaching, I am sure that at least its small town clientele would be very happy about the whole thing.

THIS is the sort of day that makes one think of things like Helen Mitchel's poem, Tioga Road. I defy anyone to read that without feeling the spell of the Sierras.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

NOT A CIRCUS, BUT . . .

RANKLY speaking, I like to go to the circus because I like to see horses and slim ladies who obey the loud commands of the ring-master and other barrel-chested males. I can laugh at the clowns, but too much of them spoils the circus for me. Not that I would dare to draw actual comparisons between a circus and the Hal Roach comedy, Swiss Miss, on the preview credit sheet of which Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy's names are the only ones typed in capitals. Nor is it musically really an important production, the score being by Phil Charig, musical direction in charge of Marvin Natley. Two or three of the tunes are quite entertaining in a joyful sense of that word. Of these I shall speak anon. Chorus work, too, is good. One musical gag is particularly funny. Soap bubbles come out of organ pipes when a bucket of suds is upset and the water runs into the organ pipes on the floor below. In due course, bubbles come out of the tune holes when the instrument is played. There is more monkeybusiness, including a chimpanzee, but to me the pleasant surprise was the presence of two quite uncommonly voiced singers, Walter Woolf King, a baritone, and Della Lind, Vienna soprano, who is to be starred in the Los Angeles Civic Light opera season during the week of May 23, when Charles Previn conducts The Student Prince.

Mixing Things Up...

IF COURSE, the emphasis of the whole production O is on amusement and the lightly tripping, frolicking music for the title leaves no doubt to that. One hears a bit of pretty yodeling, because Swiss Miss plays in the land of the Emmenthaler. One hears also some infectious country dances. Of the more original melodies I would mention the Cricket Song. Unfortunately it is orchestrated with a trowel, although the noise unloosened by the operator, probably under official orders, was big enough for a five-alarm fire. Perhaps the orchestration is better than it sounded on this occasion, but it seemingly lacked the characteristics of specific instruments which the title suggests. As a tune it is winsome. Unfortunately, it is taken over, without rhyme or reason, by a full-throated chorus, brought into nighly unbelievable presence, (one could not call it action by the longest stretch of imagination), by a mere switch of the camera, as it were. In fact this sort of thing, occurring again with slight variations, made one wonder whether Swiss Miss is a film-musical, or an old-fashioned stage operetta, transferred rather sweepingly to the screen. Speaking of transfers, Laurel and Hardy have to move a piano from a hotel to a tree house.

Clever But Helter-Skelter...

IN SHORT, Swiss Miss is a Laurel and Hardy quadruple-fisted comedy with bits of operetta thrown in. It suggests a meal of several courses, served quick-

ly and not entirely in the usual order. While the two comedians are stuck with the piano on a flimsy bridge, suddenly some not exactly meaningful background music is heard for a few moments. It does not even swing in telling rhythm with the bridge. Della Lind's first song, coloratura, too, lacks introduction or motivation. She has a lovely voice, but is not a coloratura and large portions of this florid piece were not sung in tune. For which there is no excuse in the films. During a gypsy song the soprano, however, revealed brilliant qualities in every respect, singing with splendid emphasis and perfect purity. She is a singer decidedly meriting better opportunities than in this role. This applies also to Walter Woolf King, possessor of a splendidly resonant, easy and warm-toned baritone which he displays naturally and with musical ease. King is given more opportunities and he impresses me as a singer who, with the proper music-histrionic assignments, should prove a profitable asset to any studio. Neither artist may be vocally well-known on the screen, but an enterprising and far-sighted producer could earn his official title for that very reason. It is relatively easy to make the marquee lights shine more brightly with such names as Swarthout or Eddy, but it requires producing with lesser known singers. That is no reflection on these artists just named. Quite the contrary, I believe they would rise to the occasion.

What Do They Remember? . . .

NO ONE can deny that films are essentially a visual art. Primarily they are a dramatic art, in which the story, the words and manner in which they are spoken, and music form the chief components together with actors and acting, musicians and musicmaking, stage settings plus that corps of craftsmen from designers to directors and photographers. In short, pictures presume an immensely complex and ramified process from the moment of conception on a story-writer's typewriter to the final touches of the closing chords of the end title. There are many "forgotten" men and women on the payrolls of Hollywood today. Few of them complain, and vitally important as music is today to the picture, strangely little is said about it in publicity and the review columns of the press. That may be due to the poor calibre of music which accompanied pictures until a few years ago. In the first sound pictures music, like sound. was more of a phenomenon than expression, somewhat as in the case of the first color pictures, color as pigment was a thrilling addition irrespective of the subtler qualities of color achieved since. But music has added and is adding more than color, and even apart from the song-hit composer or the popular singer, merits more recognition at the source of inception than it receives. Private comment and increasing fan-mail from the general public indicates that effective background music is making more of an impression, in fact an impression so lasting as to impress even the heads of music departments.

Does It Sell Tickets? . . .

IN ONE of the major studios there hangs a framed I legend in practically every office. The challenge reads: "Does It Sell Tickets?" It is a justified question, a most important question. The exhortation hangs also in various rooms of the music department, but there is also that other question: "Would it not sell more tickets, if it (the music) were publicized more than happens to be the case practically without exception?" In order to avoid allusions and so as not to seem personal I will not use names. The process of reasoning seems to be that if the singer be a famous actor or a famous prima donna, the mere glamor of the name will suffice to advertise the picture. The other assumption is that if so-and-so sings, it is in itself advertising for a song. Of course, the composer is mentioned, but hardly more than that. A certain studio paid a composer, nationally known for more than 20 years, a record-breaking figure. The photographic files at the studio did not obtain a single picture and nowhere on the lot were there to be had complete data about this composer. However, I am of the opinion that pictures and legitimate story material on this composer and about a considerable number of his lesser famous colleagues and musical associates, would prove valuable promotion material. Would it sell tickets? It certainly would, if convincingy presented.

Once More the Academy . . .

DO hope Hollywood film musicians will make an learly start to set up a system of determining claims for the different Academy awards for music which will obviate the errors of last March. In the Holluwood Spectator of March 19 I discussed the highly debatable, because artistically unwarranted, selections of winners. Music was compared, i.e., dumped into the same classification, although comparisons were not based on proper knowledge and equality of approach. Comparisons and preferences led to decisions, when and where considerations of quality or appeal could not be the same. A score compiled from famous popular classics naturally won over superexcellent but original background scores. I think the remedy must come from the musicians. The board of the Academy no doubt desires a sane approach to the questions involved. But, again, this correction must come from the musicians of Hollywood. They must insist on a fair process if they wish fair findings. And fair findings will result in greater rewards for the living. The winning score, One Hundred Men and a Girl, was an excellent one, but, except for adding certain classics to the musical screen literature of this country, the honor choice did nothing to advance original screen music in Hollywood. What are the composers and music department heads of Hollywood going to do in the matter? And when will they do it?

Musical Movie-Go-Round . . .

RECORDINGS for MGM's Great Waltz take place in the huge Versailles ballroom set used for Marie Antoinette. The picture will show several scenes in which Johann Strauss conducts a super-orchestra of some 90 players. So the studio employs for the recording of those scenes an orchestra of as many performers as the audience will see. To top this, the luscious-toned Toscha Seidel plays the violin soli and obligati which Ferdinand Gravet will enact on the screen. The score will bear the name of Dmitri Tiomkin who is doubly busy as he is writing also the music for Henry Hathaway's Spawn of the North at Paramount. It was an interesting sight to see the orchestra in the somewhat stripped ballroom with its lavish array of monumental clusters of massive columns and porticos suggesting heavy marble structure. The floor is still laid with black and white marble squares a yard square at least. One could easily imagine being in a shell-torn Madrid concert hall, the orchestra carrying on, despite the damage done to the hall. MGM's music chief, Nathaniel Finston, let me listen to two vocal test records made some time ago with orchestral background by Joan Crawford. The star most evidently possesses not only surprising but quite distinctive vocal qualities, to judge from these excerpts from Offenbach's Tales of Hoffman and Mozart's Don Giovanni. She is working now with Rosenstein, MGM's vocal expert.

Another Roundelay . . .

ONE of the Crawford recordings is a duet and her partner is no other than the illustrious Rosa Ponselle. MGM already has more eminently artistic singers under contract than any other studio. Whether Ponselle's name will be added to that stellar list, Nathaniel Finston would not say. But, he is much of a diplomat. . . . I am glad to see W. Frank Harling back on the Paramount roster. He wrote part of the music for Souls at Sea, incidentally some of the best of the score. He has been assigned to make music for Men with Wings. . . . If Sam Goldwyn really makes a picture based on the experiences of an exiled musician in Europe-with Jascha Heifetz playing violin soli-I could hardly think of a better composer than Louis Gruenberg. Not that Gruenberg is an exile. Emperor Jones opera is one of his bestknown works. And Gruenberg is sufficiently versatile and theatre-minded to suit Producer Goldwyn. . . . I see that Frank Lloyd will make a sound version of Divine Lady. The silent version was accompanied by a lovely score based chiefly on authentic English tunes and sea chanties. It was made by Louis Silvers and Cecil Copping. . . Twentieth Century-Fox is about to "glorify" Irving Berlin's tunes, Paramount announcing a film called St. Louis Blues, Selznick making ready for Gone With the Wind. That will mean good Negro music and singing of Spirituals. Which makes me think of Carlyle Scott's Negro chorus. Conductor Scott makes his own arrangements, not published yet, and they together with his singers should prove a find for a musicminded producer.

CAMERA ANGLES

By Robert Joseph

MANY THOUSAND POTENTIALS...

RECENTLY in the Spectator it was pointed out that a number of leading commercial film producing companies were invading the exhibition field, that carefully and interestingly made documentaries were slowly supplanting inferior short subjects pushed out by Hollywood. The market for these commercials was estimated at about four hundred thousand points of exhibition. Up to that time, however, the market was the special province of the commercial film, distributed gratis for the promotional value of certain products. It was also indicated at the time that both Eastman and Bell & Howell were prepared to sell an inexpensive 16mm camera and sound machine within a short time. However, another firm, the Gumbiner Synchro Sound Co., announced a perfected sight and sound machine, to market at about one-fifth the cost of the regular 35mm machine, or for approximately \$1300.

Tower Film Productions ...

JEROME BRESSLER, formerly with Supreme Pictures, sensed the potential market for films which did not have a special commercial message to impart. It does not follow that because some commercials are well made, and therefore unobtrusive, they all are. And it is reasonable to assume that the 16mm exhibitor market would welcome good non-commercial films. To answer this need Bressler formed Tower Productions and announced the filming of the first full length 16mm feature picture, Pinnochio, based on the Italian fairy story. His 16mm production plans have the same elements as 35mm production with one exception. The costs are about one-fifth as great for a picture of the same magnitude on the larger negative. Using "fire proof film," a new development employing cellulose actate instead of cellulose nitrate, and planning to shoot ten reels, Bressler assembled a production unit of capable men. Leon Barsha will direct the picture, scripted by Endre Bohem. Robert Cline, well-known westerns cameraman and Richard Leitner, the sound engineer who perfected the Gumbiner machine, will act as technicians. Film editor Roy Luby, one of Hollywood's most prolific cutters, will do the final editing. Gerhardt Dorn will write the musical score, and Paul Palmentola will design and execute the sets. The cast will include ninety-two speaking roles.

Blueprint for the Future ...

AJOR studios have long recognized the neccessity for doing away with the cumbersome and expensive 35mm equipment. This machinery jumps costs before a foot of film has been taken. Producers interested in paring costs have been waiting for a 16mm machine which will eliminate excessive expenses. This

Tower Film, the first of its kind, becomes a blueprint for Hollywood to watch. Enough money is being spent to make it a worthy rival of any 35mm picture of the same type. The market is wide open for feature length pictures which have nothing to sell but entertainment. Pinnochio may open new vistas.

GOOD WORD FOR CAMERAMAN...

IHEN I go to a mystery picture I like to be mysti-If fied. A palm, then, to Cameraman Stanley Cortez for his masterly handling of the cemetery sequences in The Lady In The Morgue. It looked like night and it looked like a cemetery. I also enjoyed his work in panning and trucking, according to the quick cuts designated by Director Garrett. Cortez worked fast; but he worked well. Let this be a tribute to all cameramen who do more than start when the director says "Let's go!" and stop when he says, "Cut!"

FAIR EXCHANGE IS NO ROBBERY ...

RECENTLY Connecticut's Supreme Court ruled that Bank Night was a lottery, "contrary to the public policy of this state." Oklahoma's Attorney General made a similar ruling against a game called "hospitality night." District Attorney Foley of Bronx, New York, banned chance games. The government ruled that notice of bank nights through the mail was illegal. The Federal Communications Commission ruled that there could be no bank night information given over the air. The trend, it seems, is showing the way back to showmanship. If the present sweep against theatre chance games should be successful, the independent exhibitor and the chain manager will have to get back to the business of selling patrons motion pictures. Though exhibitors have rarely voiced their opinion on bank night and other games, it is safe to assume that chance games came in unwanted with the steady flow of inferior B pictures. Give-aways and take-aways formed poor substitutes for good pictures; but they were substitutes.

Allied Theatres Attitude ...

ON REFLECTION it could only have been the desperate situation of subiliperate situation of exhibitors with nothing to exhibit which drove the president of the Allied Theatre Owners of the Northwest to write to Sam Goldwyn anent his New York arrival remarks on Hollywood inferiority, "wait until these chance games are definitely out of existence. You won't only be compelled to run double features in the palaces that you and other producers have acquired; but you will find that triple features, and even four of your so-called B, C, D and E pictures won't get them in."

Even Stephen ...

THE president's expression seems to be more rooted in bitterness than in logic. But his attitude is understandable. The industry is slowly taking away the showman's chief drawing power, the chance games. Hollywood recognizes the evil of theatre lottery, as surely as do the theatremen themselves. But with the courts lined up against money and dish nights, why not even up the score and let Hollywood line itself up against some of the major evils that it itself promulgates? The same Allied outfit refers specifically to the Saturday and Sunday night radio shows that exploit Hollywood talent as well as Hollywood's chief product, its motion pictures. Writes the Allied president again, "You and a few other producers decided that you could ruin the business entirely if you would take all of your outstanding stars and give the public free entertainment via the radio...on nights of the week during the peak of what is supposed to have been the peak hours of show business." Why not a balanced compromise? No free give-aways in the theatres; and no free giveaways over the air?

MINOR NOTES ON MAJOR THEME...

THE German government, in its current campaign to find substitutes for everything except cannon fodder, announces that one of its chemists has discovered a way of treating celluloid to transform it into a highly volatile material, easily adaptable for explosives. In March, 1954, with bombs dropping on all sides, from his ivory tower, high over Radio City, Quigley will say to Terry Ramsaye, "That was no propaganda; that was Emil Jannings in Der Herrscher."... An Australian exhibitor recently built the Ozone Theatre, at Glenelg. He included a special room, fitted on all sides with glass windows, for the use of fretful children and their mamas. This he calls the "crying room." Also appended is a tea shop and a luxurious comfort lounge. The theatre of the future will be equipped with bingo games, crying rooms, ping pong tables, dance halls-and even a few seats for those who might come to see a motion picture . . . Alexander Korda, always with an eye to the different thing, will produce a picture in Australia during the fall of this year. However, he will not leave his desk in London. Rushes will be flown to London every week, and important matters will be taken care of over the phone and radio. This is nothing new, for some Hollywood producers directed their productive energies from the reserved stalls at Santa Anita.... To The Victor is gathering early honors for the best picture of the current season. One patron complained to G-B Exchange Manager Stern that the picture was nice but the Scottish Highland exteriors and interiors indicated a cheap budget. . . .



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SIR HUGH WALPOLE DISCUSSES CINEMA

EXTRACT from an interview with the eminent English author, Sir Hugh Walpole, published in Film Weekly, London. Readers of the Spectator will notice that in stating that the main trouble with Hollywood's pictures is the producers' lack of knowledge of the nature of their medium, Sir Hugh expresses an opinion the Spectator advanced years ago and many times has repeated.

WHEN I leave the cinema (said Sir Hugh) after seeing the average Hollywood picture my mind is a complete blank. The film was probably quite slick and amusing, but I might just as well have gone to the nearest cafe and had a cup of tea and a crumpet. The effect upon my mind, in both cases, is exactly the same. I can, of course, remember the main trend of the story, but I have completely forgotten the expressions which passed across the faces of the characters and how the incidents were worked out. It is all just a hazy dream, and within a few hours the whole film has vanished from my mind like a mirage. Why is it, then, that for days and even weeks after seeing Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs I can plainly recall, among many other things, the sequence in which the tortoise falls downstairs? There is only one answer. I remember it because Disney happens to be an artist with great and original powers of perception. What does a tortoise feel like when it finds itself on its back? That is a question which anyone of us who has ever seen a tortoise must have pondered. Disney, because he is endowed with true artistic perception, is able to give us the answer. He studies all his animals first-hand. Having discovered the universal and invariable truth about a tortoise he is able, with legitimate exaggeration, to convey his information to the world at large.

Novelettish Exaggeration...

IN THE majority of Hollywood films the exaggeration is of a very different sort. They are completely artificial from beginning to end, and beneath the flamboyant emotionalism there is not one grain of perception or truth. The incidents and characters are confused and second-hand, like the incidents and characters in a novelette. The reason one so often encounters these half-formed, unconvincing characters on the screen is because the film industry has never really grasped the true nature of the cinema. Producers have borrowed too many ideas from literature and from the stage and have tried to place on the screen situations which are purely theatrical or literary. Actors, trained on the stage, are placed on a chalk-line in front of the camera and are expected to create a character as they would in the theatre. Acting in the Thespian sense has no place on the screen. It is quite impossible in films to create a three-dimensional character as on the stage. The whole process should be completely different. To cover up the essential superficiality and insignificance of the characters thus created, the producers found it advisable to pick out certain of the players and glamorise them with publicity about their private lives, their love-affairs, yachts, clothes and motor cars.

Disney Ignores the Theatre...

THE stars became the necessary labels with which to sell an otherwise uninteresting commodity. In every film in which a particular star appeared, he or she gave the same old performance against a new background. Thus you get the star convention, which in the past has been the greatest brake on progress. It is said to be impossible to sell a film without the 'label.' Yet Disney, because he understands the nature of the screen and can produce living entertainment, is able to pack cinemas all over the world (even in the Middle West) without the aid of stars. Disney is consistently successful because he has ignored theatrical ideas and the normal conventions of Hollywood and has created a type of entertainment which suits perfectly the two-dimensional qualities of the screen. Far from trying to disguise the limitations of the cinema he has created a little world of phantasy (much as did Lewis Carroll in literature), through which he can express the many things he has observed first-hand from life.

COMMERCIAL FILMS

DEAR MR. BEATON:

We have read with keen interest your editorial comment headed "Commercials and Audiences" in the Hollywood Spectator of April 9th, and wish to take this opportunity of thanking you for the sane, fair attitude expressed concerning theatrical advertising films of a certain type.

As you may or may not know, Caravel has been the first non-theatrical organization to enter the regular exhibition field with sponsored films wherein the entertainment qualities of this type of film have been of first importance and the sponsor's message has been intelligently included at the end of the production and as a component part of the story.

To prove this point, we have produced and are now distributing for Bristol-Myers, makers of Ipana, a single reel Technicolor subject called Boy Meets Dog. The story material is based on one of the best known syndicated newspaper comic features, "Reg'lar Fellers"; the special songs are the work of Frank Churchill, composer of Snow White; the large background symphonic-swing orchestra is conducted by Nathaniel Shilkret; and the film carries a remarkable voice impression of Fred Allen, as well as other well-known stars.

It has been our object to insure the entertainment qualities of our sponsored films by the use of names, story material, production staffs comparable with the finest example of short production by the other major organizations. The sponsor's message is presented as a logical part of the story for a duration of sixteen seconds near the end of the film.

That thousands of motion picture patrons are in accord with the views expressed by you in your editorial comment has been proven during the past month with the presentation of Boy Meets Dog on the first-run screens of various theatres in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Richmond, Norfolk, Baltimore and other cities. In each instance motion picture patrons, over their names and addresses, have indicated keen appreciation of the entertainment qualities of this type of sponsored film and their desire to see more productions of this nature.

In connection with the point you make that the industry proper does not wish producers of sponsored pictures to give them to exhibitors without cost, may we point out that this has been one of the evils of this phase of exhibition in the past, and the majority of advertising films have been of such low entertainment grade and of such high advertising content, that not only could first-run exhibitors not present them on their screens, but the producer and sponsor have had difficulty obtaining screen circulation in the smaller theatres.

We are offering the entire exhibition field pictures which have received the unqualified critical endorsement of the motion picture trade press, as per the campaign book I am sending to you under separate cover, and instead of asking exhibitors to run these pictures without cost, we are paying for the screen circulation at a rate commensurate with the number of patrons reached by this medium of advertising.

To prove our point that this type of sponsored film is as acceptable to the exhibitor as it is to his patrons, the theatres which up to date have presented Boy Meets Dog have accorded more theatre and general publicity to it than to various other shorts of major organizations which have appeared on the same program.

Caravel Distributing Corporation
By BERT ENNIS

New York, N. Y.

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The Adventures of Robin Hood

Original Screen Play*

by

Norman Reilly Raine

* In Collaboration

Hollywood 10 cents SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—June 11, 1938

Vol. 13-No. 9

European Papers Do Not Like the Secrecy of Greta Garbo's Gadding

Industry Would Be Wise to Prepare for the Possible Passage of Neeley Bill

Opposition to Commercial Films Deprives
Public of Entertaining Pictures

Walter Wanger Gives the World a Picture
That is a Plea for Peace

... REVIEWS ...

BLOCKADE ★ THREE BLIND MICE ★ THE TOY WIFE WIVES UNDER SUSPICION ★ SPEED TO BURN

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



FROM EUROPE, ABOUT GARBO . . .

FROM Andre Forchett, a Paris, France, Spectator subscriber, comes an interesting letter relating impressions he received on a recent and somewhat comprehensive tour of Europe which included various spots touched by Greta Garbo and Stokowski while they were flitting about Italy and France doing their best to keep one jump ahead of press reporters and cameramen. Forchett tells me that if they had kept it up much longer, Greta's box-office rating in Europe would have suffered a decline, Parisian papers, in particular, resenting her aloofness. Garbo for years has been the outstanding film favorite in Europe. According to Forchett, Clarence Brown, on his recent trip abroad, received marked attention from the press because of his having directed Garbo in so many of her pictures. Only scant mention was made of anything else he has done on the screen. When Garbo visited Continental Europe, the press and public were ready to do her marked homage, and the manner in which she treated both did much to impair her popularity. "If her producers," writes my Paris correspondent, "do not keep her at her home in Sweden or in America, she is going to lose her rating as their greatest money-maker over here."

Victim of Unwise Selling . . .

VER here Garbo already has lost her top box-Office rating. What following she has consists chiefly of those who early became her admirers, and since have been loyal to her. Every year a great new audience enters film theatres, and Garbo does not attract it. The new public cares little for her, and that can be attributed to the manner in which the press, finally tiring of her elusive attitude, has soured on her and turned thumbs down on favorable exploitation. Unwise selling by both Metro and exhibitors has been another factor in reducing her box-office potency. Metro has tried to capitalize her aloofness, and exhibitors think they have done everything possible when they put her name on their marquees. No concerted effort has been made to sell Garbo pictures, but much effort has been made to sell Garbo herself, to force her on an unfavorable market under circumstances which she herself makes difficult. I will admit that exploiting Greta is a tough proposition. The only thing more unwise than not permitting her to talk to the press would be to permit it. There are few things she can talk about in a manner to impress an audience of reporters. She does not read intellectual writing or seek contact with intellectual groups. It is difficult to analyze her. She is a superb actress, but knows nothing about acting, cannot discuss it or explain her own reactions when going through even a scene which is great when it reaches the screen. All that, of course, is no concern of the public, which pays its money only to see the scene in the picture and has no interest in her thought process while it was being shot. But a star's personal popularity influences consideration of the artistic merit she displays on the screen. Garbo is not personally popular in this country. The box-office reflects that. If acting alone attracted audiences, she would be near the top of the box-office list. The present general box-office depression can be attributed to the film industry's policy of selling people instead of pictures. I have advanced that argument so many times that I will content myself now merely by introducing Greta Garbo as Exhibit A in proving its soundness.

CLARENCE SCORES A BULL'S EYE . . .

ON THE cover of the Spectator of February 26, the leading article in the issue was exploited as follows: "Cutting Down Dialogue; By Simple Device Spectator Has Urged on Picture Producers for Years, Clarence Brown Shows How It Can Be Done." The article inside dealt with a sequence in Of Human Hearts in which the camera told the story without the help of dialogue. The other day a technician who worked on the set when the picture was being shot, told me he heard Clarence say, after a scene had been completed, "We are now going to make a scene for Welford Beaton." The scene was the one I analyzed after seeing the picture in preview. Clarence hit the mark he aimed at.

ANTI-BLOCK BOOKING MENACE . . .

THAT there is reasonable expectancy of the Neeley anti-block booking bill passing both Houses of Congress and becoming a law of the land is expressed by Variety (N. Y.), which concludes an extensive review of the case with this paragraph: "Unless something is done to appease the reform element or to both really excite and convince a substantial

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element of Congress that block booking is fair to exhibitors, as well as the most economical and suitable method of distributing Hollywood output, it appears only a question of time before the majors will find the system outlawed by Congressional decree. History of such campaigns is that it usually takes several years to make a running start but once a bill has gone through one branch of the national parliament eventual enactment is a foregone conclusion." The difficulty which Variety suggests is that the film industry will find it hard to persuade Congress that the present selling practice is fair to exhibitors; and if an effort be made to prove it is the "most economical and suitable method of distributing Hollywood output," the industry will find itself in danger of being laughed out of court. Before the opponents of the bill toy lightly with the word "economy" they should prepare themselves to establish the justice of the enormous executive salaries and the millions of dollars distributed annually in the form of bonuses which swell the incomes of those already receiving the salaries. Senators and Congressmen probably will take little interest in the technicalities of the film industry's distribution methods. The size of the salaries and bonuses alone will be sufficient to persuade them that something is wrong somewhere, and they will support the bill in the hope that, whatever it is about, it probably will have a beneficial effect in making film financial affairs less

Business's Main Asset . . .

fanciful.

SATISFIED customers constitute the main asset of any business. I am by no means an authority on the industrial history of the United States and may be wrong in my belief that it contains no record of any other concerted move on Congress by customers of a specific industry to seek relief from what they consider unfair selling practices. For ten years on the film horizon there has been the smoke of discontent, and there must be some reason for the fire's continued burning. Recently I wrote of the case of the owner of a film theatre in Needles who wished to secure Deanna Durbin's Mad About Music and was told by Universal that the only way he could get it would be to buy twenty-six other pictures with it. I can see no fundamental difference between that and a haberdasher's refusal to sell a customer a suit of pajamas unless he purchases also twenty-six pairs of socks. There must be something wrong with any selling practice which makes it necessary for a customer to buy a lot of articles he does not want to get one he wants. Another point which must impress the bystander is the fact that the anti-block movement has been carried on persistently for a decade. It would seem that it must have some merit to give it so long a life. Independent exhibitors, who are waging the war, are a common sense lot; if their cause had no merit, they would know it by now and would accept the present selling methods as the film industry's legitimate manner of conducting its business. But to top all the other arguments is the fact I already have mentioned—the industry has a lot of

dissatisfied customers. And during the decade the methods have been attacked, the film barons have made no movement of their own volition to reduce the cause of the dissatisfaction. If that is a demonstration of good business judgment, then I must be wrong about Hitler and all other topics upon which I have definite convictions.

EDITH DOES OWN SINGING . . .

MONG the young screen players whose careers A should prove interesting to follow is that of Edith Fellowes, a clever young miss whose most recent picture was Little Miss Roughneck, in which she plays the name part, and which ends with a grand opera excerpt which Edith sings in a manner that made all the Hollywood people who saw it take it for granted that some gifted grand opera singer had done the singing and that what they heard was not Edith's voice. But it was, and it appears to me that it will not be long until this talented young person becomes a big star in big musical screen productions. Already she has demonstrated that she is an actress of ability, and all she needs to assure her gaining vast popularity is intelligent handling by the producers in whose pictures she appears.

GUARDIANS OF OUR WELFARE . . .

WILL HAYS refuses to give his benediction to commercial films. "The sole mission of the screen is to entertain," shouts the Quigley publications. Straight advertising on the screen is unthinkable and propaganda is abhorrent. Let us suppose the management of the Ambassador Hotel wished to draw the Cocoanut Grove to the attention of the entire country, to advertise it, to spread Grove propaganda far and wide; and suppose it paid Paramount to make a picture showing the Grove and bearing its name. And suppose Paramount filled the order by making the picture, Cocoanut Grove. Would you refuse to laugh at the comedy in it because it was a commercial picture? Would you see no merit in the music because the picture was made for purposes of propaganda? As a matter of fact, would you care two hoots who paid the cost of production or why the picture was made, as long as it entertained you? And how do you know the Ambassador did not pay for it? You don't know-or care. But Mr. Hays cares. The Quigley publications care. You may trust them to guard you against the evil commercial pictures would do you. It is all right for you to see Cocoanut Grove because Paramount made it, but if precisely the same picture had been made by the Ambassador, something awful would happen to you if you saw it. Let us give thanks for Mr. Hays and Mr. Quigley.

Propaganda Not Recognized . . .

QUIGLEY'S contention that the screen's mission is to entertain is a sound one. The Spectator's contention is that useful propaganda has a place on the screen if it be presented in an entertaining manner, a contention the mere mention of which infuriates the

publisher. Warners made a propaganda picture, one whose plea is for prison reform, Crime School, its name. Several times I have charged Quigley with not knowing what propaganda is, but in my review of Crime School I gave him credit for being consistent and stated my belief that the Herald would be scathing in its denunciation of the Warner preachment. But it looks as if I was justified in accusing him of not knowing what he was talking about. At all events, the Herald swallowed Crime School, hook, line and sinker, and without recognizing it as outright propaganda. I quote the opening paragraph of its review of the picture: "Grim, forceful, yet not forbidding because of the wealth of robust human humor it contains, the moral preached and the sane way in which the love interest has been included, Crime School promises to attract wide attention. It is instructive as a study in sociology, wherein incorrigible boy criminals become bestial under cruel corrective treatment, yet, when given a chance, respond to humane considerate influences, nevertheless, in the last analysis Crime School is entertaining, stark at times but always delivered in straight from the shoulder style.'

Factual Film a Treat . . .

NE evening recently I took a course in steel mak-Uing. I saw every process from the scooping up of the iron deposits to the tempering of the steel until it is ready to be made into a needle or a battleship, a buttonhook or a bridge. It was an intensely interesting four-reel illustrated lecture, or rather a visual demonstration of how steel is made, the pictures accompanied by an entertaining talk by Edwin C. Hill and a sympathetic musical score by Robert Armbruster. Technicolor photography not only makes the scenes more authentic-granting it catches the natural colors—but it is responsible for some of the most beautiful shots I have seen on any screen. To the person with a questing mind. Steel, Man's Servant, will come as an intellectual treat; to the average picture patron it would be an outstanding feature on any film theatre program, beauty, thrills and instruction being blended in a truly showmanship manner. There is no advertising; nothing is offered for sale and the film has no direct commercial significance.

How Hollywood Will Regard It . . .

BUT the film industry will deny the people who support it the pleasure of seeing Steel because it was made by the subsidiaries of the U. S. Steel Corporation. Will Hays viewed it, said it was grand, but that his organization could not handle it because it was a commercial film. The makers offered it to various general releasing companies, but all of them spurned it as if it were something unclean. I do not know upon what terms it would be offered exhibitors, but I imagine they could get it for only the cost of handling, which would be a boon to them with box-office conditions as they are now. But no—it is a commercial film, made outside the industry—and imagine giving exhibitors entertainment for practic-

ally nothing! The very thought is enough to make our film barons shudder. If the public wants instruction with its screen entertainment, it can patronize the regular product of the Hollywood studios and be instructed in how to make love, how to dance the Big Apple, how to drink hard liquor and acquire other similar social airs and graces. Steel is propaganda, Hollywood will claim—propaganda for what, it would find difficult to state, unless it is for the use of steel in the building of steel bridges and steel sky-scrapers, and if the steel industry wants to impress that fact on the housewives of the Dakotas, let it go hire a hall, which is the advice Martin Quigley, on behalf of the film industry, told nationally prominent educators who had the effrontery to express an interest in the current trend of film entertainment.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

MY PUTTING was so bad on my last round of golf that on the eighteenth green my ball finally dropped into the cup through sheer ennui. . . . Before we depart for a formal affair I have to pass Mrs. Spectator's inspection; during the thirty years she has been doing it she never once has failed to take a final jab at my tie. . . . The office in which I do my writing is one hundred and twenty-six feet long and forty-two feet wide; its ceiling has great holes in it and in its walls are wide-open spaces; it is floored with flowers and gravel walks, and roofed and walled with mulberry, locust, pepper, acacia and cypress trees, beneath which is garden perfume and from which come the songs of birds. . . . While Freddie, the spaniel, was galloping down a path just now, a mocking bird zoomed down head-on at him unexpectedly and he stopped so suddenly he skidded on his behind; when I laughed he slunk under a hydrangea bush where he is now sulking. . . . I told Sid Grauman I did not roller-skate; he said he didn't; I challenged him to put on skates with me and race me: he accepted with so much alacrity that I am staying away from his roller skating place, even though everyone tells me it is an interesting place to visit. . . . Why ants—the red ones that eat flowers? I have to pour poison down the entrances to their dugouts, and around the entrances next morning are hundreds of their little dead bodies; I don't like to kill things, but what is a fellow to do? ... He hoohooed at me through the fence which skirts our dirt road, a six-year-old friend of mine who lives somewhere along it: in each hand he had an empty beer bottle; I told him to go along to the gate, which Mrs. Spectator opened for him, and when he reached me he asked me if I wanted to buy two bottles; said someone told him someone bought bottles and he thought I might be the one; wanted a nickel for them; I had only a dime and I offered that; nothing doing, a nickel or nothing. Why? Because the Good Humor man soon would be down the road and you couldn't buy what he wanted with a dime, as it cost a nickel, and he had to have a nickel, or perhaps five pennies would do. There apparently being no nickel anywhere about the place, Mrs. Spectator and I, by pooling our resources, managed to produce the right number of pennies, and the deal was concluded just as there came to us the tinkle of the Good Humor bell. Would anyone like to take off our hands two used beer bottles? All we are asking for them is the amount of our investment in them. No profiteers are we.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

WALTER WANGER SERVES HUMANITY . . .

● BLOCKADE; Walter Wanger-UA; producer, Walter Wanger; director, John Howard Lawson; photography, Rudy Mate and Russell Lawson; special effects, James Basevi; music, Werner Janssen; film editor, Dorothy Spencer. Cast: Madeleine Carroll, Henry Fonda, Leo Carrillo, John Halliday, Vladimir Sokoloff, Reginald Denny, Robert Warwick, William B. Davidson, Fred Kohler, Peter Godfrey, Carlos de Valdez, Katherine de Mille, George Byron, Nick Thompson, Rosina Galli, Ramon Ros, Dolores Duran, Guy d'Ennery, Edward Brady, Murdoch MacQuarrie, Harry Semels, Baby Marie de la Paz, Demitrius Emanuel, Hugh Prosser, Arthur Aylesword George Lloyd, Allen Garcia, Herbert Heywood, Roger Drake, Paul Bradley, Carl Stackdale, Skins Miller, Evelyn Selbie, Mary Fox, Belle Mitchell, Cecil Weston, Ricca Allen.

THE screen has made its plea for peace, has stripped war of the remainder of its rapidly disappearing glamour and has raised an eloquent voice in behalf of all humanity. Walter Wanger's Blockade is something more than just a motion picture. It is motion picture history—the first definite recognition by the screen of the fact that its mission is to serve mankind as well as to entertain it. Blockade is entertainment, a gripping spy drama that will hold any audience. It does not preach a sermon in which war is denounced and peace extolled. It shows us peace in the opening shot, and later the story leads us through scenes in which in passing we see the crime which war commits—see it in the eyes of hungry babies and their mothers, and read it in the faces of aged men and women, people, all of whom have done nothing to disturb peace, but who pay the biggest price when it is distorted by war. War itself we do not see-no marching troops, no false trappings in which murder is disguised as patriotism—just the stark skeleton of war as it is, a gigantic, heinous international racket in the hands of maniacs who wear the mask of patriotism. For that, the world owes a debt of gratitude to Walter Wanger.

Dieterle's Direction Great . . .

SOLELY from the standpoint of screen entertainment—the determining factor in the extent of its service to the cause of peace—Blockade will prove to be a notable box-office success. It is done on a magnificent scale, is directed brilliantly and powerfully, and acted by a cast of outstanding merit. Both Madeleine Carroll and Henry Fonda have many good performances to their credit, but never before have they been inspired to rise to the heights they achieve in this picture as their response to the superb direction of William Dieterle. Differing widely in all its essentials from his Zola and Pasteur, Blockade further stamps Dieterle as one of the screen's really great

directors. The script of John Howard Lawson, his own story written in screen-play form, is brilliant screen writing. The picture rises from the pastoral peace of a Spanish valley in which oxen draw a farmer's wagon and a shepherd pipes to entertain his sheep, from that to the terrific manifestation of man's supreme insanity, suggesting wholesale slaughter on battle fields and showing wholesale suffering in the homes of the slaughtered. But through it all the story pursues its unbroken course, as if interested only in itself, in the recital of its inhumanity and the development of the beautiful romance which still makes it human. You hear the story as it is told in dialogue and you see the sermon as the camera records it; you buy the entertainment and will be satisfied with your investment; you will absorb the sermon and will applaud it.

Some Fine Performances . . .

THE beauty of Madeleine Carroll has been the chief I feature in some of the parts she was given to play in former pictures, but in Blockade she makes us lose sight of it in our admiration for the feeling and understanding she reveals as a member of the war racketeering group and her ultimate reformation as she exerts her efforts to checkmate her former associates. She and Henry Fonda share some strongly dramatic scenes. What an admirable actor Fonda is! The simplicity of his technique, his earnestness and sincerity make him impressive in any part he plays. To me his appeal is the same as that which makes Jimmie Stewart one of my favorite screen actors. There is something primitive about each of them, an ingenuousness which makes us sympathize with them even before we become aware of a cause for sympathy. I hope Blockade will make the demand for Fonda so emphatic that Hollywood will keep him busy. Another feature of the picture which pleased me is the appearance of that able actor, Leo Carrillo, in a part free from the use of dialect. I enjoy him in any role, enjoy his dialect, but the lack of it in Blockade comes as a refreshing departure. He gives a fine performance.

Technically a Triumph . . .

BLOCKADE has many speaking parts. In the longer ones we have John Halliday, Vladimir Sokoloff, Reg Denny, Robert Warwick, William B. Davidson and Fred Kohler, able actors all. Scores of others have bits with a line or two each and each does his or her full share towards maintaining the sincerity with which the story is told. Dieterle, being an intelligent director, makes his players talk like the characters they play, a display of directorial technique which the Spectator has pleaded should be a feature of all productions, but which we see so seldom it makes it apparent that Hollywood has not sufficient intelligent directors to take care of its entire output. Technically, Blockade is a cinematic triumph. The sets of Alexander Toluboff and Wade Robottom lend themselves admirably to the photography of Rudy Maté. The special effects by Russell Lawson and James Basevi are one of the picture's strong assets; and a word of praise must go to

Dorothy Spencer for a notable example of expert film editing. I leave to Bruno Ussher the evaluation of the musical score of Werner Janssen (see page 12), saying no more about it myself than to express the hope that the growth of real screen-art understanding in Hollywood will be rapid enough to speed the day when all screen productions will have continuous scores. The present method of handling music in pictures shows that those responsible for it still are in the cinematic kindergarten class.

ONE OF SEASON'S BEST . . .

● THREE BLIND MICE; 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, Raymond Griffith; director, William A. Seiter; screen play, Brown Holmes and Lynn Starling; based on a play by Stephen Powys; photography, Ernest Palmer; theme song, music and lyrics, Lew Pollack and Sidney D. Mitchell: art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Hans Peters; film editor, James B. Morley; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical director, Arthur Lange. Cast: Loretta Young, Joel McCrea, David Niven, Stuart Erwin, Marjorie Weaver, Pauline Moore, Binnie Barnes, Jane Darwell, Leonid Kinsky, Spencer Charters, Franklin Pangborn, Herb Heywood.

SPARKLING comedy. A story about nice people exclusively and without even the suggestion of a villain. With no heavy to chide them, the characters get into and out of muddles of their own creation, have a jolly time all the way through—a nice, quiet, refined time—and bring to the screen just about the neatest bit of comedy we have had in a year or so. The picture has a smart society atmosphere and displays throughout the best of taste. Of course, the leading characters discuss their most intimate, private affairs so that all the other couples on dance floors can overhear what is said, but that is a conception of refined society conduct which most Hollywood directors have, so when we see it in Three Blind Mice we accept it as a matter of course. But it seems strange to me that Bill Seiter, who, on the whole, has done a most brilliant job of direction, should so abruptly take his players out of character by having them air their private affairs in public. The fault, I suppose, lies primarily in the script, and had its birth when pictures were silent and we imagined the players were whispering their confidences into one another's ears.

It Is Well Cast ...

TO BILL'S credit is a collection of outstanding performances by a group of most agreeable players. Loretta Young, Marjorie Weaver and Pauline Moore play sisters, all nice girls any parents would be glad to have about the house. Loretta, always one of my prime favorites, never was better and creates the impression that she is having a fine time in the part. Both the others display rare charm. Opposite the three is a trio of the screen's most pleasing young men, Joel McCrea, David Niven and Stu Erwin, each of whom long since has established his rating as an accomplished actor. Here they have roles tailored to their individual measures and each acquits himself admirably. A surprise performance is that of Binnie Barnes. It generally has fallen to Binnie's part to be à rather catty person, but here we have her as a joyous

scatterbrain who is a delight in every scene she plays. Witty, vibrant, she romps through her part to the continual accompaniment of audience laughter. Apparently in her we have at hand another accomplished comedienne. Santa Barbara, the locale of the story, has reason to be grateful for the manner in which the production reveals its charms. The picture is a visual treat, both indoor and outdoor shots being artistically composed and beautifully photographed. By all means see *Three Blind Mice*. It will not disappoint you.

WILL HOLD YOUR ATTENTION . . .

● WIVES UNDER SUSPICION; Universal; producer, Edmund Grainger; director, James Whale; screen play, Myles Connolly; based on play by Ladislaus Fodor; photography, George Robinson; art direction, Jack Otterson and Chas. H. Clarke; film editor, Charles Maynard; musical direction, Charles Previn. Cast: Warren William, Gail Patrick, Constance Moore, William Lundigan, Ralph Morgan, Cecil Cunningham, Samuel S. Hinds, Milburn Stone, Lillian Yarbo, Jonathan Hale.

THE cheap title drew a snicker from the preview audience, but the picture turned out to be better than its title. It is a well directed domestic drama with murder and murder-trial trimmings. It is all old stuff and it telegraphs ahead what is going to happen, but it will manage to hold your close attention by reason of the impressiveness of Jim Whale's direction, even though he goes a little too far in drawing the character of Warren William and making him unreasonably vicious in his official capacity of district attorney. William is the leading man, the hero, yet I doubt if even at the end, after his reformation and promises to his wife, he will have the degree of audience respect he should have to make the ending convincing. But the whole thing smacks more of the theatre than of the screen. In straining to achieve effect, the picture presents a third degree scene in which an officer of the law screams into a prisoner's ear a demand that he should talk, while a lot of police lean over the helpless victim and beetle their brows at him. As the prisoner (Frank Morgan) already has confessed that he had killed his wife, I could not figure out what the screamer wanted him to talk about. Nor could I understand why later the district attorney, after his sympathy is aroused for Morgan, destroys the wax record of the confession which would have proven the mental stress he was under when he committed the murder.

Performances Uniformly Good . . .

BUT, as I have said, Wives Under Suspicion will hold your interest, and that is the chief consideration when you visit a picture house. Morgan's inquisition scene is a brilliant bit of dramatic acting which drew loud applause from the audience. All the performances are satisfactory. Even though his characterization is unnecessarily harsh, William's work appealed to me as the best he has done on the screen. The always attractive and intelligent Gail Patrick scores in a role which her personality relieves of some of its inherent drabness. She makes a wife whose

charm accentuates the story value of her husband's neglect of her, William being the husband who is so intent on chasing criminals that he leaves the way open for some other man to chase his wife. Miss Patrick impresses me more with each performance that she is destined to do big things on the screen. Constance Moore, a newcomer to me, is a charming young thing with beauty and screen personality which should take her places. William Lundigan, who plays opposite her, is her male counterpart, an agreeable young fellow with ability and an ingratiating personality. Cecil Cunningham is cunning but by no means a ham in her engaging characterization as the district attorney's secretary. Lillian Yarbo, a clever young colored woman, contributes comedy which makes it impossible for us to believe her as the maid in the home of such a mistress as Gail Patrick. Jonathan Hale weaves in and out of the story in a capable manner, but leaves us in doubt as to who he is and why he is there. Milburn Stone is another who helps things along satisfactorily. Edmund Grainger, producer, mounted the picture handsomely, some of Jack Otterson's artistic and atmospheric sets giving George Robinson opportunities to present some fine photography.

POOR DIRECTION SPOILS IT . . .

● THE TOY WIFE; MGM; producer, Merian C. Cooper; director, Richard Thorpe; screen play, Zoe Akins; photography, Oliver T. Marsh; musical score, Edward Ward: art direction, Cedric Gibbons, Harry McAfee and Edwin B. Willis; women's costumes, Adrian; men's costumes, Gile Steele. Cast: Luise Rainer, Melvyn Douglas, Robert Young, Barbara O'Neil, H. B. Warner, Alma Kruger, Libby Taylor, Theresa Harris, Walter Kingsford, Clinton Rosemond, Clarence Muse, Leonard Penn, Alan Perl.

ICTIM of poor direction. Richard Thorpe, who directed successfully many of Metro's smaller pictures, proves himself unable to develope all the values of the story material he had here. Physically, the picture is a big one, beautifully mounted by that master craftsman, Cedric Gibbons; generous in its use of characters to people its scenes, and rich in the costuming of the period. Brilliantly cast by Producer Merian Cooper and provided with a good script by Zoe Akins, its director had all the ingredients for an outstanding success, but what comes to the screen is ninety minutes of cinematic dawdle and slowly paced action which will weary the majority of people who see it. Thorpe's direction has elemental flaws. In one sequence we see a large dinner party gathered around a table in a private house. After an establishing shot, there is a cut to two of the guests whose conversation we hear. It is all we hear. Apparently all the other guests are stricken speechless by the grandeur of the occasion and are rendered incapable of causing even the tinkle of a fork against a plate. The story is set in the genteel period of the social life of New Orleans of a century ago, yet two of the chief characters, Luise Rainer, the carefully reared daughter of a gentleman of the day (H. B. Warner), and Robert Young, the scion of an aristocratic family, while dancing carry on what

should be an intimate conversation, loudly enough to be heard by all the other dancers.

Miss Rainer in Monotone . . .

DUT the greatest weakness of the picture is the **B** direction of Miss Rainer. Her performance is flightiness in monotone, without a relieving, wholly human touch to reduce its monotony. Her gooseneck gestures, wide-eyed glances and panting dialiogue will wear away the resistance of the stoutest audience. The other characters fare better. The ability of Barbara O'Neil, Melvyn Douglas and Robert Young proved strong enough to weather the stilted direction in as far as their individual performances were concerned, but not strong enough to put the picture in the best-seller class. The Toy Wife is not box-office, but it could have been if given a more accelerated pace. While we tire of the story itself and the characterization of the leading woman, we do not tire of the three performances I have mentioned and those of Alma Kruger, H. B. Warner, Libby Taylor, Theresa Harris, Clarence Muse (the last three talented colored players), Walter Kingsford and others in small parts. Visually the production is a smart one, beautifully photographed by Oliver Marsh. Adrian once more commits the fault of attiring his women so elaborately that our attention constantly is drawn from what they are doing to what they are wearing. Metro stars com and go, and sometimes I wonder how much Adrian's costuming figures in their going. In a perfect art creation no one element should be made to attract our attention at the expense of the creation as a whole. Adrian's gowns always are individual attractions.

FOR THE YOUNGSTERS . . .

• SPEED TO BURN; 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, Jerry Hoffman; director, Otto Brower; screen play, Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; based on original by Edwin Dial Torgerson; photography, Edward Snyder; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Chester Gore; film editor, Fred Allen; musical director, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Michael Whalen, Lynn Bari, Marvin Stephens, Henry Armetta, Chick Chandler, Sidney Blackmer, Johnnie Pirrone, Chas. D. Brown, Inez Palange.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

SEEING this picture is like reading a story from one of those pulp magazines devoted to sport yarns. Dialogue is obvious and stilted, the characters have about as much depth as a mud puddle. There is plenty of action in it, but the plot is fabricated with little ingenuity, being another variation on the form(Continued on page 9)

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. OPTOMETRIST

1725 North Highland Avenue Hollywood, California HEmpstead 8438

EXHIBITORS' MONTHLY BUYING GUIDE

Not many pictures reviewed in May Spectators will do a great deal towards lifting the prevailing box-office gloom. The outstanding money-maker is The Adventures of Robin Hood, an attraction which should appeal to all classes of audiences. There are some other productions on the list which have sufficient merit to please audiences, but are not startling enough to arouse the public out of its non-attendance spell. Many good pictures suffer at the box-office chiefly because exhibitors are not good

salesmen. If they have no big names to toy with, they are stumped. The fault for this lies primarily with distributors, who offer names instead of pictures when selling to exhibitors. Some of the most entertaining pictures made in Hollywood during the past year proved poor box-office attractions because they were not trademarked with star names. Wiser selling methods by both distributors and exhibitors, if inaugurated now, eventually would establish box-office conditions on a more stable basis. It is a thought both groups should mull over.

(The figure after each title denotes date in May on which the review appeared in the Spectator)

COLUMBIA

★ HOLIDAY (28)—A really notable talkie; an abstract theme given concrete expression and coming to the screen as engrossing entertainment for those who can enjoy a story with more intellectual than emotional appeal. Really outstanding performances by Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant, stars, and Doris Nolan, Lew Ayres, Edward Everett Horton, among supporting players. Perhaps not for small houses, but certainly a first-class attraction for the big ones. Running time, 93 minutes.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

- ★ SWISS MISS (14)—Hal Roach production presenting Laurel and Hardy in too much of the comedy which made their two-reelers popular—that is, too much for those who can get too much of the two comedians. Those with capacity for absorbing all that is presented here, will find the picture a constant joy. Roach has given it a fine production and the supporting cast is all right. Running time, 72 minutes.
- ★ HOLD THAT KISS (14)—On the whole a pleasing little picture which tells its story smoothly but does not give any member of its cast an opportunity to turn in anything but a routine performance. It is a story of amusing complications and has to its credit the gracious presence of Maureen O'Sullivan who must have friends wherever pictures are shown. If you can get your customers in, they will go out satisfied. Running time, 75 minutes.
- ★ THREE COMRADES (28)—A beautifully done picture, a touching story of a great friendship and a great romance. It will not be appreciated by the masses but if you have customers who can enjoy the best in today's picture making, you, with a clear conscience, can offer this one to them. A fine cast, fine direction and the usual Metro fine production. Running time, 100 minutes.
- ★ YELLOW JACK (28)—A most interesting recital of the series of events and discoveries which resulted eventually in ridding Cuba of the yellow fever scourge which caused the deaths of so many Americans during our occupation of the island following the war with Spain. More a scientific treatise than popular entertainment, but an honestly made picture which will please all those who wish to be informed on the matter it deals with. Running time, 85 minutes.

PARAMOUNT

★ COCOANUT GROVE (21)—If your people still go for musicals, they probably will like this one as well as any other they have had lately. I enjoyed it even while wondering how I could enjoy it after seeing so many others

cut from the same pattern. It has the Yacht Club Boys, Ben Blue and other first-class specialists, as well as a capable cast headed by Fred MacMurray and Harriet Hilliard. Good music and complete production. Running time, 90 minutes.

★ HUNTED MEN (28)—One of the gangster cycle with a different twist. A "Jones Family" story with a racy, spicy background of coincidences and gang terror. Well done with names that you can sell—Lloyd Nolan, Lynne Overman, Mary Carlisle. A little extra exploitation will sell this one. Running time, 65 minutes.

R-K-O

- ★ VIVACIOUS LADY (7)—A brilliant comedy with splendid performances by Ginger Rogers and James Stewart, both names with marquee value. One of the best directed pictures of the season. Exhibitors should put the name of George Stevens on their lists of directors whose pictures they want to show. He gives this one general appeal that will live up to all the boosting exhibitors put behind it. Running time, 90 minutes.
- ★ BLIND ALIBI (14)—A badly made picture that will hardly hold up the weak end of a dualer. Pass it by if you can, and if you can't, plug Richard Dix and the dog angle in the picture. Running time, 65 minutes.
- ★ GUN LAW (14)—For the whistle-and-stomp trade. The story is an interesting bit of fiction as far as plotting is concerned, but the plot is the dominant element. There is nothing else to attract a discriminating spectator. George O'Brien makes the hero as convincing as the part could be. Running time, 60 minutes.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

- **KENTUCKY MOONSHINE (7)—The Ritz Brothers hit their stride in this one, their personalities registering more effectively than in any previous appearance. Many patrons who have not cared for them in the past will be immensely tickled by the brethren's present antics. Their impersonations of Kentucky mountaineers throughout most of the picture are very clever, and some skits in the finale are bang-up buffoonery. Tony Martin scores with his singing, and the cast is generally capable. Has a slow spot or two, but, everything considered, is a good musical. Running time, 87 minutes.
- ★ ONE WILD NIGHT (14)—The policemen, so commonly the butt of Hollywood humor, get the laugh again, being held up throughout the film as a lot of stupid and dishonest ignoramuses. Patrons who are not purturbed at seeing their public officials ridiculed, however, will find this a diverting little B picture. Action is rapid, there are

sufficient laughs, and Dick Baldwin and June Lang play with freshness and vitality. Running time, 72 minutes.

★ KIDNAPPED (28)—One which misses. Slow, plodding, unbelievable, all that Warner Baxter, Freddie Bartholomew and a capable cast can do does not give it substantial box-office rating. Do not let distributor salesmen put over anything on you in the way of selling Century's latest "glamour girl," Arleen Whalen. She has nothing yet; may have later, but I doubt it. Running time, 85 minutes.

UNIVERSAL

- ★ SINNERS IN PARADISE (7)—Feeble stuff. The story is pointless and dull, a hodgepodge of divergent viewpoints and objectives. Characters do not win our interest; nothing much happens. The picture, in which a group of assorted personalities are thrown together on a desert island following the recking of an aeroplane, lends itself to lurid advertising, but most of your patrons would be disappointed. Running time, 65 minutes.
- ★ THE LADY IN THE MORGUE (14)—A smart mystery picture that will please all the fans, and especially those who want to see a fast-moving picture. No special names to sell, but one of the Thin Man cycle that is a worthy successor. Running time, 70 minutes.
- ★ THE DEVIL'S PARTY (28)—Story material is rather shallow, vague in intent. The characters do not sufficiently capture our interest to be much concerned over their plight. Much of the action is given over to controversy between them, and the yarn slumps in the middle. The preview audience was evidently restless. Players try hard to make something of their parts, but they have little to work with. Running time, 62 minutes.

UNITED ARTISTS

- * STORM IN A TEACUP (7)—Distinguished for its vitality. The sheer momentum the story gathers is truly remarkable. Though the picture decries political tyranny and privilege, its dominant tone is one of whimsicality. Superbly acted. The Scotch dialect of some minor characters becomes a little thick now and then, and the recording is not at all times as meticulous as in American films. But audiences which like good cinema, and have gotten beyond being disconcerted by superficial differences between foreign and American films, will find the picture highly enjoyable.
- ★ THE DIVORCE OF LADY X (14)—If English pictures generally find favor with your audiences, they will like this one. The charm of the piece lies mostly in the debonair and sophisticated spirit in which the story is told. Merle Oberon, Laurence Olivier, and others give good performances. Do not overplay the bedroom situation in advertising, as it is not really very torrid. In technicolor.
- ★ COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO (21)—They are digging up old successes in an effort to plug the holes in the boxoffice dike, and none should do better in revival than this one. Artistically and technically it is as fresh as if it had been made yesterday. It is outstanding entertainment with all the elements which make for popularity, a picture on a grand scale but with appeal to our elemental emotions. Get behind it and it should perform nicely at your box-office.

WARNER BROTHERS

* THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD (7)-One for the whole family. Full of those joyous deeds of daring and narrow escapes which could not happen but which all

of us have dreamt of doing ourselves. A purely imaginary reincarnation of a mythical Scotch hero, Warners have mounted it magnificently, cast it superbly, and it comes to the screen as a great piece of entertainment. In a measure its success thus far proves the soundness of the Spectator's selling theory presented above in the introduction to this month's resume of last month's reviews. Olivia de Havilland and Errol Flynn are not yet in the Gary Cooper-Shirley Temple box-office class, yet Robin Hood is making money because it is being presented as good entertainment and not as a star vehicle. Running time, 105 minutes.

- ★ CRIME SCHOOL (14)—An engrossing sociological study, ably written, directed and acted, but somewhat over the heads of the ordinary run of picture patrons. Rather drab in theme and locale, but so very well done that it will justify all the exploitation you can give it. In the cast are all the rowdy boys who figured so largely in Dead End. That may mean something to your people. Running time, 85 minutes.
- ★ GOLD DIGGERS IN PARIS (21)—Though it has numerous touches of originality and wit, good pace, and a measure of glitter, there are stretches of the film comprised of such fustian, and the story itself is such a propped-up thing, that this can scarcely be rated as an outstanding musical. Rudy Vallee is seen to better advantage than in previous screen appearances, and other members of the cast are in good form. You might hand out cotton, to be plugged in the ears when the shrill Schnickelfritz Band comes on. Running time, 97 minutes.

PREVIEWS (Continued from page 7)

ula whereby the horse thought to be out of the running rewards the confidence of those who take him in hand by winning the race. However, the youngsters, who were generously represented in the preview audience, having come also to see Judge Hardy's Children, were intensely stimulated by the proceedings, clapped and roared no end. Spectators with maturity of outlook, though, are likely to turn thumbs down. This exclusive appeal of the film I view as a production fault.

Kids Would Understand . . .

THERE is no reason why a picture of this kind could not be made to appeal to both children and mature persons. I am sure that, had the characters been written and directed to act like human beings, and the situations more carefully developed, invested with greater conviction and emotional potency, no kid would have scratched his head and complained, "I can't understand what this is all about." It is not that the race-track formula is at fault, for it has been used to create many interesting films in the past, and, given imaginative treatment, will be used to make many good films in the future. Treatment is everything.

No Stinting with Sound . . .

ANOTHER shortcoming of this picture is that it is created according to a prevalent theory that a talking picture can only live up to its name by talking or making a noise almost incessantly. During a period of several minutes, and when scenes were changing quickly, I watched to see if anyone stopped talking for as long as three seconds. They didn't. When nothing remains to be said in English, some of the characters shout at each other in Italian; and in one scene, Chick Chandler, having to enter a room, fills in the lull by making a curious noise with his fingers against his lips. The film fairly cries for background music, and when some of the characters take up instruments and play a musical number toward the middle of the story, the effect is like putting hot, dry lips to a cool brook. The extent to which music can enhance a film of this sort was demonstrated a few months ago in Sergeant Murphy, a picture similar in story. Not that Speed To Burn would stack up with the earlier film anyway; it lacks the human values.

Juvenile Actor Impresses . . .

MARVIN STEPHENS, appearing as a jockey with a deep devotion to the discarded horse, is a talented young actor. Would that his role had given him greater emotional latitude. Michael Whalen plays with his usual poise and elegance, though if he is a police officer, I'm a duck's uncle. Lynn Bari is agreeable of personality, if not playing with very great imagination; and she should not curl her eyelashes till they look like shavings. Sidney Blackmer, after his splendid performance in Heidi, is back in a groove, doing his stint as a villain. Henry Armetta, Chick Chandler and others are competent. Outstanding is young Johnnie Pirrone, who plays with considerable vigor and conviction. Otto Brower directed. Jerry Hoffman, associate producer, was noted as a hardboiled critic when he wrote for a local newspaper; used to dismiss B's with a few words.

HONOR FOR MARTIN QUIGLEY

Loyola University at Los Angeles, will confer the degree of Doctor of Literature on Martin Quigley, publisher of Motion Picture Herald and Motion Picture Daily, at the seventy-second annual commencement exercises, Sunday, June 12th. The honor is being conferred primarily because of the fine service to both pictures and the public that Martin has done in connection with the formulation and the enforcement of the Production Code which has been instrumental in keeping the moral tone of the screen on a high level. The Spectator applauds the action of the university in thus recognizing Martin's services.



CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD

of

MABEL KEEFER

FTER reading Editor Beaton's description of the A Grand Canyon of the Colorado—no, that is not right—he did not attempt to describe it. Starting again: After reading what Editor Beaton writes about the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, I am wondering if it would be possible to film it in a manner that would bring us not only its beauty and grandeur, but something of its spiritual vibrancy? Even though the film must fall far short of the Canyon itself, it would be an achievement to bring as much as possible to the millions who will never see it otherwise. A musical background? I tremble to think of it, but if it were done by a master-yes, perhaps a master musician might do it after he had steeped himself in the spiritual majesty of the Canyon itself and spent hours studying the film. . . . And I think he would need to spend some time in prayer.

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON quotes a sentence in the original French which he says should be engraved in enduring stone over the entrance gates to all our conservatories of music:

Quie de sentement ne fait Son dit et son chant contrefait.

He then gives us this delightful translation: "He who writes or composes without the true inner fire, without himself feeling the emotion he tries to describe, he had better not say anything at all, for he will always be a phony."

LESLIE HOWARD'S statement that films attract him more than anything else on earth, and that "their potentialities are limitless," has the effect of a tonic on me. When an actor of Leslie Howard's calibre feels like that toward motion pictures, it is going to mean something vital in the development of screen art.

As I entered a motion picture theatre last night I found myself walking with a spring in my step and a feeling that I might execute a fancy dance step any minute. What caused it? A Disney Silly Symphony was being shown on the screen, and the lilt in the music immediately permeated my being. There also were some soft passages of unusual loveliness that delighted me. That, my friends, is a psychological effect that reaches all the way to the boxoffice.

QUITE a long time seems to have elapsed since the editor of the Spectator last tormented his readers with mention of "one of Mrs. Spectator's lemon pies." Wonder if she has not been making them, or,

if he has developed a new sense of kindliness toward his fellow men.

WHAT a convenient alibi that word "probably" is —especially for the weather man.

N EDITORIAL in the Country Gentleman has A this to say: "We specialize on geography and people. We want to see a unified America, dominated neither by the city nor by the country, but where mutual respect and understanding is the prevailing order. . . . And, in a world as troubled as this world is today, it is incumbent upon every businessman to begin a sympathetic first-hand study of America and its people." Can you think of any medium that could give greater aid to the realization of such an idea than the screen? Now please do not bring Martin Quigley into the picture! I still do not believe he speaks for the film industry as a whole. (But I wish to goodness someone connected with the industry would say something—or has it been said?) In the same editorial, Mr. Rose, the editor, speaking of things he learned as a boy, says: "I also learned woodcraft, how if I always kept three points in line I would never travel in a circle, never lose my direction in the forest." What a fine short subject could be made showing all these things—giving valuable information—with the scenic beauty of the forest and a musical background that would suggest that it was being invoked by the spirits of the forces of nature.

RECIPROCAL disapproval! I like the sound of that and I think I shall carry some with me to put in my eyes in an emergency—use it as Bert Harlen used it on the man who sat next to him. (Spectator of May 21.)

CATO, whoever he was (a philosopher, perhaps?), is credited with saying, "I think the first virtue is to restrain the tongue." But that is where Editor Beaton got his idea of having a minimum of dialogue in motion pictures.

RATHER interesting the comment of Paul Vincent Carroll, author of the play Shadow and Substance, anent American newspapermen. He is quoted as saying: "They are fine lads. Not at all like the newspapermen in the films."

MY HEART STOOD STILL—when I read in the editor's Mental Meanderings that Throgmorton had turned out to be celery, but resumed its pumping when I found that "no part of Throgmorton will be eaten."

A C.I.O. strike, affecting twenty-seven hundred employes. is in progress in one of our large manufacturing concerns, and the lines of picketing men and women walking round and round in circles seem to be symbolic of the general condition of the country.

BELOW THE WASTE

By Don Quixote

GLASS BRICKS-\$45,000 ...

THE revolution in North Hollywood which saw many heads roll in the mud is happily about over. Charles R. Rogers has paid the penalty for some rather unfortunate decisions, and no matter what oil the studio may gush on trade paper waters, New York interests objected to highhanded extravagances on the West Coast. It was inevitable that the trouble had to be scotched. Don Quixote takes no personal satisfaction in anything that happened. He has misgivings, if anything, for there are many whose heads also rolled who were entirely innocent. The Jacksonian principle—to the victor—still holds true. Hollywood well knows the ins and outs. It is therefore something of a tragedy that capital should make the change, and that friends of one order should make way for friends of another.

Glass Bricks For Sale ...

NE of the traditions around Universal City is that you and you and you can pick up glass bricks for your newly redecorated home for a song. It seems, according to rumor, that Mr. Rogers ordered some \$45,000 worth of glass bricks for a cinematic fiasco called Top of the Town. Of these but \$9.00 worth actually appeared in the release print of the picture. The computations are so exact due to the efforts of one of the underlings of the accounting department who did the figuring as a lark. It was an expensive pastime, of course, and the final story was indeed a sad one. However, Universal, for a time, was called "House of Glass." Not because the insiders could not look out, and the outsiders could look in, but because at least a dozen pictures that emanated from that studio featured glass bricks. For many weeks glass bricks were cheaper than cheap compo board, ordinarily used in the making of sets. One little man with secret architectural ambitions all of his own, even furnished himself a barbecue pit on his Valley ranch with the transparent spoils of that debacle.

Extra, Extra and Extra...

THE Rogers hors de combats is now a matter of history. However, it might be wise to use some of the information that tradition has handed down as a sort of blue print. During the filming of the aforementioned gargantuan set, Art Director John Harkrider, under orders, designed a night club expanse so big that Brother Rogers had to invite about four hundred extra extras to fill the place up. And the fact that the producer did not see eye to eye with the director on the dance sequences; the fact that a special camera crane had to be built to take it all in; and the fact that hundreds of extras were sitting around for many moons waiting for something to happen, did not help much in lowering costs. Don't get me wrong. I am all for the extras. I think a picture like Top of the Town would eventually ease the Film Fund out of existence.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

MUSICIANS generally, not only those affiliated with the picture industry, will appeciate the fact that Producer Walter Wanger salutes also composer Werner Janssen "for his splendid symphonic musical score" when acknowledging in the preface to the preview program for Blockade the collaboration of his principal co-workers. It is a rare occasion when a film executive remembers his composer, especially in this public fashion. However, Producer Wanger, by the very subject and challenging tenor of his screen creation, demonstrates that he possesses individuality and courage of conviction. Wanger says nothing new when he states that "a motion picture is the co-ordination of many minds and talents. Each element depends upon another." Needless to reiterate at length, the musical minds often are called in late into production conference and work. I fancy this has not been the case in this instance. At any rate, believing as I do in the important scope and future of film music, I am personally grateful to Walter Wanger for this statement. He was wise in choosing a Werner Janssen for this task, because this young American has evinced on other occasions his own individuality as a man and artist. Janssen must have been thoroughly in harmony with what one might call the editorial purpose of a film which sounds a stern and stirring denunciation of war waged ruthlessly abroad against non-combatants at this very hour.

Not a Subtle Subject . . .

 $m{A}$ WAR picture is hardly ever an easy assignment for a composer. I am not aware of Editor Beatton's comment on the screen virtues of Blockade, but my present reaction is that it lacks in subtlety of idea, action or dialogue. Apropos of dialogue and background music, Composer Janssen and that ever faithful and sensitive worker behind the scene, Irvin Talbot, who conducted and recorded the technically difficult score, the proportion of musical dynamics in relation to the spoken word is unfailingly deft. Music never beclouds speech, although upon first impression I am not sure whether some dialogue, such as the confession of the girl spy, would not have been bettered by a musical background, while at other moments the absence of music would not have been felt. Altogether music has been recorded with high fidelity for tonal timbres. In as much Janssen frequently uses a Debussyesque, almost vapour-light color of sound, quite superior standards of orchestration, orchestral performance, recording and dubbing were required. A war picture indeed is not a pleasant task for a composer. To express the tension, horror and pathos of the subject he has relatively little choice. Either he writes somewhat in the manner Richard Strauss's Hero's Life with its super-Lisztian aplomb, or he turns to the more modern Debussy-Stravinsky style of impressionistic technic. Janssen preferred chiefly the latter method. Occasionally he resorted to the former. Momentarily he waxes superficially operatic when a well-schooled chorus is heard from aboard a feed relief ship as that vessel has broken the blockade. Excellent singing from rough sailors in the danger zone!

Finesse and Meaning . . .

SEEMED to sense a certain lack of conviction at various times, although I am by no means unmindful of the actual quality of Janssen's music. He is not a conventional melody maker. I could not help asking myself why a simple shepherd should play a tune which sounds like an afterthought inspired by the opening flute solo in Debussy's Afternoon of a Faun. Would not a simple, unmodernized Spanish folktune have been better? The score as a whole sounds heterogeneous in that respect. Spanish music of the traditional type in the fashion of Granados or Albeniz is placed between bits of Debussyesque or Honeggerish nature reveries. In the finale one heard fanfares of Brahms-Wagner-Strauss type. The title music did not impress me as significant. A theme, perhaps of the Spanish "mother earth", for low woodwinds, sounded engaging and meaningful. Combination of bells and chord effects proved fine. The grotesque distortion of dance music in the bombardment-frantic city proved of telling effect. The chorus of people again impressed me as rather operatic. There were fine transitions such as from the church into the world of reality. Janssen looked deeply into tragedy-filled eyes of war-tortured womanhood. By way of suggestion because the audience does not actually see the sinking of the first food ship-Janssen succeeded admirably. Using descending tremolo chords and a touch of woodwind, he told not only of an actual event, but also let his hearer look in the hearts of the starved civilians, whose hope for help sank with the boat. Music thus illustrated also an emotional void. Janssen more than once thus evinced skill and sensitivity. All in all, he merits well Producer Wanger's praise for setting music to an unsubtle picture.

The Composer's Approach . . .

THERE are two ways of setting the musical character of a film score. One is to write music of the style or taste as the persons in the play would choose to express themselves, if they were real and had the opportunity of doing so. The other way is that of the composer who puts himself in the position of a commentator reflecting aloud about what the figures on the screen think, or do. If the composer should incline to use a melodic and harmonic idiom more modern, more sophisticated than the personages of the play, the music, fine as it may be in itself, will be a psychological study in terms of tone on the subject of the film, rather than be part of, or, in a broad sense, an accompaniment to the film. Thus the human and musical adaptability of the composer will be

tried and found sufficient, or wanting. The natural idiom of the composer may be one far more sophisticated or subtle than that of the screen characters. He will have to write of greater inner veracity and intensity to bridge this difference. Max Steiner has achieved this admirably during certain scenes of Zola, while on the whole he has managed a splendid compromise in combining both methods, if methods they be called. For the most part, Korngold, although a modernist at times, has chosen the first approach and with superb results, both from a human-dramatic and a generally artistic angle.

Double Viewpoint . . .

THARLES PREVIN, the music director at Universal, had the wisdom, and perhaps also the courage, to write a score for Wives Under Suspicion which would appeal, no doubt, to the district attorney, his spouse and their friends, could they be the judges rather than the subjects of the music. It may be true that in the general trend of things the proverbial saying that all ways lead to Rome, is true. That does not hold good in the world of film music. There must be musical application and definite tonal commentary from within, paralleling less or more closely the visual message of the screen. Previn finds it best to choose music of a genre which might be chosen should the district attorney's wife turn on the radio, or if her college friends were to voice their preferences. That is musical commentary from within. Previn finds it prudent also to remove himself a little, and deal in terms of general atmosphere, such as during the tense moment when an anonymous hand turns the switch linking the power house with the electric chair. This entire sequence of suspense would be hard to bear except for the somewhat march-like, climactically mounting music. Previn showed sensible restraint. He did not compose a piece of music in the fashion of Berlioz' expletive March to the Scaffold.. But it translated sufficiently the clumsy grinding of the millstones of modern justice.

Tonal Double Exposure . . .

AM not sure whether Wives Under Suspicion does not contain scenes which would be just as expressive without music, while in some, music might definitely express the unspoken feelings or thoughts of one or the other screen characters, as one or the other becomes alienated, or suspicious. In other words, music need not speak for everything that occurs (or does not happen, in terms of action or reaction) on the screen. It can speak for one figure only, or it can provide musical atmosphere for A. and B. against which C. is juxtaposed or only silhouetted. Music can express emotions or thoughts of opposite tendencies at the same time. It is in this possibility that music can render such great service to a producerdirector who realizes that too much talking ruins the talkies. More in that sense could have been made of the scene where the District Attorney finds his wife in what he imagines an objectionably sympathetic attitude with their friend on the terrace. I might call

this procedure thematic double exposure in music. Previn has created a fine piece of background music for the confession scene and he may well share in the spontaneous plaudits of the preview audience. The recording generally is very good, and background music treated with effective evenness speaks the language spoken by the dramatist and his dramatist personæ.

Illustrative Score . . .

TITLE music in a film is, in a sense, as important as a prelude to a play or to an opera. The relation is the same, especially as in modern opera, since in the film the prelude usually leads directly into the first act. Composers of today usually write short preludes which are not so much summaries of the principal melodic contents of a lyric drama, but briefly and potently prepare for the opening scene. Considerable thought has been given by Frank Waxman to the title of MGM's Three Comrades. I would not venture to translate his meanings, but following the striking fanfares of the opening bars, there followed two changes of moods, just as the warmly colorful score is replete with contrasts and finely supplementary sound-episodes. The tale of Three Comrades is a stirring one of loving loyalty among three men, tested by a girl's love for one of them. Born a "war baby" she dies young, and one of three is killed when ballots are fought with bullets. Waxman treats the picture as an illustrator would decorate a magazine story, graphically, brightly, in the tempo and the abruptness of the quickly changing situations.

Excellent Detail . . .

WAXMAN stays on the realistic side of the picture, although an effect such as the whispering of the telephone wires is eminently well managed. Music is variously employed to better visual effects. Thus the phonograph grinding out the wedding march runs down in the middle of the impromptu. A clever commentary on life is worked in when one of the comrades corners and shoots it out with his friend's killer, who finally tries to find entrance into a cathedral. Shots crash while from within comes the joyously blissful sound of a chorus intoning the 'Halleluiah'' from Handel's Messiah. There is also a well sung choral end-title, but as it is in keeping with the quite unrealistic close to a realistic picture, I can hardly scold the musician. More character might perhaps been given to the band music accompanying the procession of the fascist group. On the other hand, Waxman has caught the folk spirit in the informal singing of the "three." One of the musically and technically best scenes is also the farewell scene in the sanitarium. Waxman permits his own music to sag and to become warped as the girl's strength ebbs. I could not help but think of Strauss' Death and Transfiguration, although I do not make this reference in a critical sense. I think Frank Waxman has written genuinely, although the subject has been worn thin since Verdi composed the last act of La Traviata.

Frances Marion Writes for Writers

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ONE day at the Spectator office Editor Beaton informed me that he had received a copy of a new book by Frances Marion, entitled How to Write and Sell Film Stories, and that when he had finished glancing it over he would like me to review it. Days passed and it had made no appearance at the office; at last I gleaned from stray comments in his editorial column that the book had found its way onto the night stand at the side of his bed, and that he was not merely glancing it over, but really reading it. When the work finally came into my hands, I began one afternoon to glance it over, but the book soon found its way onto my night stand and I too really read it. Frances Marion's work is that kind of a book. Based upon a long and rich experience in the motion picture field, it is one of the most comprehensive and pregnant books of its kind yet written, both from the viewpoints of artistic theory and revelation of the inner workings of the film industry.

Apt Quotations Abound . . .

THE absorbing story of how film stories are written, or should be written, and how they may be sold, is told in an admirable easy-flowing prose, adding greatly to the readability of the book. Further literary tone is lent its pages by abounding quotations of prominent writers, from Cicero to Shaw, all meaty and apropos, and reflecting a broad personal culture. Each chapter is prefaced by one or more quotations of this sort. Several of them have crept into my notebook. Within the chapters there is no phase of writing and selling screen plays I can think of that has not been touched upon. Characterization, plot building, dialogue, dramaturgy all come in for discussion, sometimes with penetrating analysis. And such practical matters as the operation of writers' agents, including a list of reputable ones, plagiarism, and the legal protection an author can secure, are dealt with. A full scenario of Marco Polo, by Robert Sherwood, is appended. There is really a colossal amount of theory and factual knowledge contained in the book.

Appeal Should Be Wide . . .

IT IS this comprehensiveness that should insure the work a wide circle of readers. Novices will find there about everything that can be formulated and conveyed relative to screen play writing; scribes with experience in the fiction or other fields will be rewarded with much that should help them adapt their talents to the new medium; old hands at film writing will discover crystallized there many of their own reflections and experiences—and possibly even a new concept or two. Of just what value the many-faceted theoretical content of the book will be to novices I would not presume to say. Certainly one could not keep in mind all of the manifold principles and contentions when undertaking to write a screen play.

Vividness, originality, and good dramaturgy—emphasis, proportion, and the like—can be gotten into a script in only one way, through sensing them. In the final analysis, we do not know exactly how we do anything, and especially is this true of creative work. Probably this material would be of value to no one who was incapable of discerning its essence ultimately for himself, through practice at screen writing. The value of any principles lies in their power to suggest, to mould our faculties. But talent cannot be taught.

Author Is Down to Earth . . .

CRANCES MARION is not artistically high-flown I in her purpose, however, her extensive theorizing being directed at purely commercial ends. She states candidly that, "At present the film story comes nearer to being written to formula than does any other type of writing." And she is of the opinion that "an original plot is never as essential or, in fact, as salable as is fresh and original treatment of a plot that has proved popular. As a matter of fact, film stories are rejected for poor structure and undesirable subject-matter far more frequently than for lack of originality." She knows the picture game and writes of it realistically, at least from an artistic standpoint. In fact, one is led to wonder sometimes if her matterof-fact depiction of conditions as they are does not hold some rationalization in their favor. She believes it "distinctly unwise" for a writer to assume that the group intelligence of the average picture audience is low. "It cannot be said with any degree of reason that to wish to see pleasant things and be made happy is a sign of mental inferiority." True, but the way in which one seeks these things may be indicative.

Views Are Rather Charitable . . .

ND this brings me to what, in my opinion, is the A one shortcoming of the book. Miss Marion tends to look at Hollywood and the motion picture set-up in general through slightly rose-colored glasses. Perhaps her long residence here and her association with the industry since the early days have resulted in her viewing it with a certain fondness and charity. Perhaps her participation in the activities of a local university during the writing of the work influenced its tone. There is a tendency in scholastic instruction to imbue professions and the world at large with greater logic and system than they actually possess. Everything considered, this may be advantageous in academic work, since it allows the student to retain undampened optimism and determination; but it is nevertheless misleading. Be that as it may, Miss Marion's book manifests somewhat the same tendency, lending to the present set-up of the motion picture industry a rather flattering degree of sense, especially with respect to its purchase and production of screen stories.

Profession Is Precarious . . .

WE IN Hollywood know that there isn't much sense to motion picture processes. Writing for the screen is almost as precarious a profession as acting, unless one has become entrenched through long success or by social or political connections. The rank and file of readers at the studios are incompetent to judge good screen material if they see it. And this "sour grapes" impression, your reviewer having never written a screen story, preferring to devote his spare time to a branch of literary endeavor which he hopes eventually will prove more surely profitable. It is commonly conceded that most of the outstanding screen successes adapted from published fiction or the stage, would never have reached the screen had they been submitted as original manuscripts. Something of an understatement, then, is the single and quiet sentence, "Some of the studios pay sufficient salaries to get readers of education and experience, but others, unfortunately for themselves and for the public, pay small amounts and often are obliged to employ readers lacking in background and education and unable to recognize drama unless in stereotyped situations."

Things Aspirants Should Know . . .

T IS altogether likely that a writing aspirant, if through prolonged and arduous labor he acquires the skill of writing good material and then can back up this accomplishment with almost superhuman confidence and courage, would be able to create a place for himself in the Hollywood scheme of things. But it would be invaluable to the aspirant to know what he had to go through before he attained his objective. And it would also be valuable for him to know what working conditions he could expect to encounter once he attained his niche. Some might even like to know about what artistic integrity would mean for them. These should be told what all of us in Hollywood know, that the vast majority of writers here are "selling themselves short," that for every Frances Marion or Dudley Nichols there are ten hacks. There might have been quoted a conversation such as one which comes to mind, the likes of which Miss Marion would probably be able to recall several, in which one well-known screen writer endeavored to discourage another well-known writer from bothering to incorporate a more of less profound concept into his script. "Wise up," said the former. "I figure I have to put in an hour a day working. I don't like it, but it's better than driving a truck." Or the aspirants might have been permitted to sit in on one of the inquisitional story conferences at a studio, in which the merit of a story is supposed to be determined by the author's success in defending it against the ravenous attempts of the others at the table to tear it to pieces. All this would have been valuable for the aspirant to know.

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, Jr. "The Rage of Paris" UNIVERSAL

ANDREW STONE
DIRECTOR
PARAMOUNT

Every Other Week

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—September 17, 1938

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Operating on Scripts to Eliminate Excess
Dialogue Is Not the Proper Cure

When the Box-Office Is Sick, Film Doctors
Treat the Public, Not the Patient

No Picture Is Given Increased Audience Interest by Color Photography

Kind of Publicity Pictures Are Being Given Is Adding to Box-Office Worries

... REVIEWS ...

BOYS TOWN * HOLD THAT CO-ED * TO HOT TO HANDLE
ROOM SERVICE * ROAD DEMON * FUGITIVES FOR A NIGHT
THE HIGGINS FAMILY * SONS OF THE LEGION
UNDER THE BIG TOP * THE RENEGADE RANGER
SHADOWS OVER SHANGHAI

HOLLYWOOD'S OLDEST FILM PUBLICATION; ONLY ONE DEVOTED SOLELY TO SCREEN CRITICISM

JOEL McCREA

to appear in

Cecil B. De Mille's Picture

"Union Pacific"

The Motion Picture Relief Fund Deserves the Support of all Film People who are Fortunate Enough to be in a Condition to Extend it.

(This space contributed by a friend of the Fund)



WRITERS' THOUGHT PROCESS . . .

WARNER writers have been assigned a difficult task, that of going over a data that of going over a dozen or more completed scripts in search of spots in which action can be substituted for dialogue. The intention is good. The film industry as a whole is finding it necessary to spend one million dollars in an effort to repair the damage too much dialogue has done the box-office. That is purely superficial treatment of the ailment and will prove about as efficacious as it would be to rub liniment on the stomach to cure indigestion. The Warner studio is the only one thus far which gives evidence of having realized the ailment must be treated at its source. But I fear for the patchwork method of its approach. Literary surgeons cannot cut out dialogue without leaving scars on scripts. The source of the trouble is the thought process of screen writers, and to make the cure permanent, the trouble must be attacked at its source. There are many brilliant writers in Hollywood, more than there are in any other one spot in the world, and they have demonstrated their ability to give producers what they want. The film box-office will not get the relief it needs until the thought process of screen writers is reversed and they give producers what they should

Weakness Is Fundamental . . .

WHEN a physician is called in on a case, his skill is not strained in his efforts to discover the effect of the illness. It is apparent on the surface, in the pulse, temperature, general condition of the patient. What the physician looks for is the reason for the condition, the fundamental weakness primarily responsible for it. Screen physicians called in to cure scripts should approach their tasks with as much thoroughness and with as deep concentration on the source of the weakness. They will find that in most cases it would be wiser to let the patient die and advise its parents to get another. When a script needs operating on to remove an excess of dialogue, it means it was born with a weakness practically incurable. The weakness is fundamental because the screen, in its true, and therefore its most sturdy, form, is a visual art, a medium for the presentation of entertainment for the eye to convey to the emotions. The scripts upon which the Warner literary doctors must operate were conceived on the assumption that the sound device had transformed the screen into an aural art, a medium for the presentation of entertainment for the ears to convey to the intellect. I believe there are records of operations which have been successful in changing the sex of humans, but they are extremely rare. Almost equally rare will be the complete success of operations to make as great a change in scripts.

Reconstructing a Quarrel . . .

THE place to begin the elimination of dialogue is in I the head of the person who is to write the script. The brain child should be dumb from birth; as he grows up he should use the smallest possible number of words necessary to making his meaning clear. If he is developed intelligently, he will be surprised to find how few words it will be necessary for him to use to make his way in life and become a pleasant companion for those who meet him. In a picture I saw recently, a husband and wife have a violent quarrel; he stamps out of the house, down the path to the gate, hesitates there, stamps back, renews the quarrel in which both have a lot to say; finally the reconciliation. The story reason for his return to the wordy warfare was solely to reconcile the two, what each said being the tools with which the screen writer made gradual the approach to the reconciliation. You see, the writer had conceived characters who expressed themselves only in words, had made his entire script for the ears of the audience, not for its eyes. When he wanted the wife to go into the husband's arms, he thought only in words as a method of building to it, wrote solely for the microphone, the enemy of screen entertainment; not for the camera, its friend. Let us rewrite the part of the sequence in which the two are reconciled: The husband's indignant striding down the path; gradually slower until he comes into the camera; we see him smile, turn around, go back, the camera following him; a cut to the wife peering through the curtains, smiling; back to the husband's back as he enters the

"MOVIES Are Your Best Entertainment"

By Mabel Keefer

"What is that slogan soundin' for?" said Files-on-Parade. "To bring you back, to bring you back," the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What makes you look so bored, so bored?" said Files-on-Parade.

"I'm so bored by what I've got to watch," the Colour-Sergeant said.

For they're spendin' of a million; you can hear the dollars clink;

The industry's on dress parade—they're handin' out the

They've polished all its buttons up and an' used a lot

An' they're spendin' of a million on the movies.

house, crosses the hall, opens the door to the room in which his wife waits; over his shoulder as the door opens we see the wife smiling at him; he enters the room, closes the door; fade out, leaving us outside. Visual Terms Save Money . . .

WHILE viewing the picture I refer to above, I was not thinking along the lines of the present discourse, but as I recall the entire film I have the impression that if its writer had thought in visual terms, he would have turned in a script containing less than half the dialogue he made his audience listen to. would have found his task much easier, would have given us a picture I would have praised instead of one I condemned in my review, and would have given his studio a script it could have shot more quickly, consequently at less cost, because of the number of silent scenes in it. I do not identify the writer by name, as there would be implied a criticism of his work which I do not intend. He undoubtedly gave his studio exactly what it wanted, got paid for it, and, I hope, shrugged his shoulders and muttered, "What the hell!" Like most of the other writers, he could write in pictorial language if his employers had intelligence enough to demand it. And unless all of them demand it, and get it before the million dollar shot in the arm loses its effect, there will be a call for a second million to give the public another jolt.

COLOR AND THE BOX-OFFICE . . .

0^{NE} producer hallucination which would be amusing if it were not so costly, is that color photography adds box-office value to a picture. When a picture whose entertainment values make it a boxoffice success, happens to have been shot in color, producers attribute its success to the photography, gravely declare the public suddenly has developed a yen for color, and announce that a lot of color pictures will be included in the next season's production program. I have noticed, however, that half the pictures announced for color treatment do not get it. Color in itself has no box-office value. If the audience is conscious of it as an isolated contribution to a picture, it becomes an element which attracts attention at the expense of the story; if the audience is not conscious of it, if the story is strong enough to hold the attention of the audience, as it must be to make the picture a box-office success, the money spent in providing color is wasted. An elemental rule of all the arts is that there must not be in any art creation an element which isolates itself and draws attention to itself at the expense of the creation as a whole. But picture making, Hollywood will tell you, is a business, not an art. When it awakens to the fact that the stability of its business depends upon the standard of its art, it will not find it necessary to blow in an extra million dollars in an effort to drum up customers.

REVERSE-ACTION PUBLICITY . . .

WHEN we are handing out blame for the present unsatisfactory state of film theatre box-offices, we must not overlook the publicity departments of the major producing organizations. If the aim of the publicists had been to do the greatest possible harm to the film business, they scarcely could have been more successful in achieving the aim than they have been while aiming in the opposite direction. Radio broadcasting of synopses of pictures has been one of the major insanities included in exploitation policies. Exhibitors have told me of instances in which return of admission money has been demanded of them on the score that dissatisfied ticket purchasers have seen the picture before, even though the picture was then having its first run in the community. In each case the patron was sincere, as he had heard most of the story by radio and thought he was getting something old when the picture was shown. Another blow at the box-office is the encouragement publicity departments give columnists to make public what should be film secrets. Life magazine was given publicity stills to illustrate how the public was fooled by the freight train sequence in Professor, Beware! And that is but one of the hundreds of blows press agents have aimed at picture box-offices.

FILM DOCTORS IN CONSULTATION . . .

CREDITED to Nicholas Schenck is this bit of wisdom: "The film industry can have no ills that good pictures cannot cure." The film industry is ill now, its box-office suffering from a disquieting case of malnutrition. The Drs. Schenck, Dr. Zukor, Dr. Kent, the Drs. Warner, in fact, the entire medical board of the industry, held a consultation, considered gravely the sharp drop in the patient's box-office temperature, failed to recognize the heavy coating on the patient's tongue as a significant symptom, agreed that its pulse was too low, and decided that a million dollar shot in the arm of the public, not the patient, was the proper treatment. No thought seems to have been given the fact that if good pictures would effect a cure, they also would have prevented the illness. There is no more excuse for the present plight of the film industry than there would be for a stone image to catch the measles. One can quite understand the faith of the film barons in the potency of money as a cure for film ills. The whole philosophy of their approach to picture making is that a picture which costs one million dollars must have twice the drawing power of one which costs half as much. They think a million dollars spent in exploitation will make the public want pictures which, without the million, it would not want.

When Ignorance Is Bliss . . .

COUPLE of lines in Los Angeles Examiner reveals a typical example of picture thinking: "Picture executives, convinced that musicals are poison at

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the box-office, have none on 1939 production schedules." The fact that there are no musicals on some schedules would seem to point to the accuracy of the Examiner writer in giving the reason. We have, then, the spectacle of a group of studio executivesthe salary of any one of whom would make a generous salary per head for the others if divided among the lot—solemnly acting upon its conviction that the public would spurn a picture because it is a musical and without regard for the degree of entertainment value it might possess; in other words, that the public would refuse to be entertained by an entertaining musical picture. Like many other manifestations of the thought process of those in whose hands lies the destiny of the film industry as a whole, this one is more like a superstition than a product of clear business reasoning. There is something childishly ingenuous in the attitude of executives. I do not doubt for a moment that they are honest in their belief that fickleness of public taste is responsible for the failure of musicals to maintain their drawing power. If you told them the truth—that the blame belongs solely to them because they do not know how to make musicals which will continue to entertain the public —if you told them that, they would have a good laugh, tell you you are a very funny fellow, and your joke would go galloping up and down studio corridors.

PICTURES AND THEIR PEOPLE . . .

ONE of my real favorites is Ann Sothern, soon to appear in Tay Garnett's Trade Winds, her first picture since last October. Sensible girl; got RKO to cancel her contract, takes only parts she likes; turned down a couple of dozen before accepting Tay's. . . . Good acting is not always good for the actor. Bela Lugosi, skilled actor, happened to be cast in a "horrole; did so well, others of a like nature followed; became typed; horror pictures went out, and now Lugosi is finding it difficult to make a living, even though the public would give him a cordial greeting in a sympathetic role. There always is a market for good acting. . . . Olivia de Havilland's cultivated and musical voice is among the most pleasant on the screen. . . . Occurs to me that if the film industry wished to be perfectly honest about it, the billboards of the country would be adorned with, "Motion Pictures Could Be Your Best Entertainment." . . . A screen memory: W. C. Fields inheriting a lot of money in Call It a Day, smashing into the car of a road hog; buying a new car and repeating the process until he got out of his system all the things he had yearned to do when he could afford but one car. ... I am about ready to see Katharine Hepburn on the screen again if they give her a part in which she can play the girl, not herself. . . . Glad to see Joe von Sternberg back in harness. . . . Five years ago, in reviewing a picture directed by Edward Ludwig, I said some day he would be batting in the big league; from what I hear about his direction of the Deanna Durbin new picture, I believe my prophesy is about to come true. . . . I want to see Carefree

again for another look at Fred Astaire's rhythmic golf swing; think my game has suffered by my failure to sing when I swing. . . . Columbia's pictures open with the most unattractive studio identification emblem, Universal's with the most attractive; but occasionally some of the others rise to artistic heights. It is a poor commentary on the film industry's efficiency when a picture like A Letter of Introduction has to be teamed with a gangster picture to fill out an evening's entertainment. . . . Glad to see Billy Gilbert in another picture in which he does not sneeze. . . . An entry in the notebook I have with me at all times: "Wally, GR. 6455." Waldemar Young gave me his phone number, telling me to call him up and the four of us (our wives) would have dinner together; it was my last chat with a good friend, agreeable companion and true gentleman. . . . As long as pictures are composed so largely of dialogue, it might be a good idea now and then to treat the audience to a beautifully worded speech, one which by developing the charm which words can have, if given to a character who logically could read it, would have distinct entertainment value. . . . Harry Langdon's return to pictures is an isolated instance of the screen's return to sanity. . . . If good wishes were winged things whose flights were visible in the Hollywood sky, we could see today a million of them darting in the direction of the hospital room of Bill Powell.

LITTLE PROSPECT OF SHOOTING . . .

SUBSCRIBER writes to ask me why I have tried **A** the Department of Justice's case against the major film companies and handed down a verdict in favor of the government. "When a matter gets into the courts none of us knows how it is going to come out," he writes. "The verdict may be in favor of the defendants and we may still have block booking, etc." My correspondent seems to overlook the fact that back of the government stands a congress ready to do anything to the film industry that the courts leave undone. If block booking is not abolished by court action, it will be by legislation. But I do not think either the courts or congress will effect the reforms the film industry needs for its own good. It will be another case like that of the coon which looked down from a tree to the hunters below, and said, "Don't shoot; I'll come down."

* * * * DUFFY UNCOVERING TALENT . . .

THAT El Capitan College of the Theatre is doing fine work was impressed upon me last week when I visited the cosy little Las Palmas Theatre and saw Michael and Mary, the A. A. Milne three-act play which enjoyed considerable popularity in its day. With a cast composed wholly of young players who are being trained in Henry Duffy's extraordinarily successful institution, the play provided an evening of real entertainment which asked little concession to the fact that those playing the parts were making their first appearances on the stage. I was impressed particularly with those who played the title roles,

Glen Langan and Audrey Smith. Jim Valentine Rose is a juvenile who shows promise, and Virginia Davis registers personality that some day will make her a great film favorite. And if Langan's name is not included in screen credits before long, it will be a reflection on the alertness of the scouts who are supposed to be ever on the lookout for new talent. The college presents a new play at the Las Palmas each week, and if all of them maintain the standard set by Michael and Mary, I can recommend the little theatre as a place to spend a pleasant evening. This week's bill is Spring Dance, which I have not got around to yet; next week, Doll's House, to be followed with Call It a Day.

WHAT HOLLYWOOD WOULD DO . . .

IF HOLLYWOOD producers were in a position to apply their conception of screen entertainment to all the great handiworks of nature, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, Crater Lake, majestic mountain peaks and other scenic wonders whose beauty is emphasized by the silence which enfolds them, would be wired for sound.

HARMONY AND THE BOX-OFFICE . . .

THE motion picture business will not experience the even level of prosperity possible to it until the camera is restored to its rightful place as the screen's principal story-telling medium. It will not be restored until scenarists prepare their scripts for the camera instead of for the microphone, until every line of dialogue is gone over carefully in a completed script and the final decision arrived at that the thought it expresses cannot be expressed in pictorial terms. And even then motion pictures will not achieve the popularity possible for them until the lines which are left are spoken by casts in conversational tones when such tones are demanded, and loud talking is allowed only when moods of scenes demand it. It is not loud talking itself which robs so many scenes of conviction. Nothing included in a screen creation by demand of the creation itself can disturb its harmony. But when a scene demands low tones and the audience is given loud tones, the harmony of the creation is disturbed, and disturbed harmony is not good box-office.

GOLD AND ENTERTAINMENT . . .

HOLLYWOOD had an opportunity to lower production costs to keep pace with the depression and its little boy, the recession, but took the opposite direction, increased costs, and followed the illogical course of trying to buy prosperity instead of earning it with entertainment values. In current big pictures, everything that glitters is gold.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

BO PEEP, the Pekinese, has become insufferably snooty since Jeanette MacDonald carried her in a scene in the new MacDonald-Eddy picture. . . Funny way we, as a group, have of doing business in this tax-ridden state; we pass a law to permit horseracing which makes a few already rich people richer

by handing them the greater part of the betting money, which is making poor people poorer. The sport of kings has become the graft of deuces. . . . Our second crop of roses is coming along fine. . . . Bo Peep's squatty architecture not being adapted to the physical vigor of long country hikes, has made it necessary for the Spaniel and me to exercise much cunning each morning in eluding her as we set forth; sometimes we fail, and she peers mournfully through the gate despite my assurance of sympathy. This morning the mournful look was too mournful for me; I went back, opened the gate, told her to come along. She refused; just sat there, and now I feel that her morning mourning has been her expression of sympathy for a man and a dog foolish enough to turn their backs on a home where there are bones which can be gnawed. . . . A photo of a blind man being guided through street traffic by a Seeing Eye dog, always does something to me. These magnificently noble animals ask no pay, but just a chance to go on acting as eyes for those who have none. . . . I started writing in the early morning sun, and now we will pause for a moment while I move over to the shade of the locust tree, where Freddie and Bo Peep preceded me and are engaged in sham battles with Percy and Minnie, our rapidly growing kittens. And here come Sophie and her four offsprings which we have been unable thus far to segregate into ducks and duckesses. Manchester, the biggest of the lot, makes a specialty of pecking at my shoelaces. Did any of you writers ever try to concentrate on your writing when a stalwart young duck was pecking at your shoelaces? . . . That infernal scraper has just grunted past our place again, smoothing out the bumps in our dirt road as an invitation to more cars to come whizzing along it. If I could borrow a plow, I'd hitch Freddie and Bo Peep to it and run furrows from curb to curb—I mean, to the places curbs would be if dirt roads had curbs. . . . Eugene, the colored person who does chores about the place, yesterday deposited the garbage can at the side of the road, and started work among the shrubs near it, his back to the road; a truck stopped behind him and with the idea of doing its driver a good turn, Eugene took the lid off the can and dumped the garbage into the truck. The ensuing heated argument was due to the fact that it wasn't the garbage truck. . . . Manchester must think I tie my shoes with worms. . . . He was prominent in the days of silent pictures, an actor who drew big money; he and his wife did not spend in that era of spending, were looked upon as tightwads, were not popular socially or professionally; talking pictures forgot the prominent actor; he is seen only rarely now, never doing anything bigger than a bit; but he owns his own home, is putting his boy and girl through college; each of the four members of the family has a car, and I know that several former spenders, who used to call him tightwad and who, too, have been overlooked by talkies, long since have discovered that the purse strings of the tightwad never seem to be tied. . . . There, Manchester, I hope you're satisfied, now that you have untied both my shoes.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

WE APPLAUD A BUILDING . . .

● BOYS TOWN; Metro picture and release; director, Norman Taurog; producer, John W. Considine, Jr.; screen play by John Meehan and Dore Schary; from an original story by Dore Schary and Eleanore Griffin; musical score by Edward Ward; musical arrangements, Leo Arnaud; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, Urie McCleary and Edwin B. Willis; photography, Sidney Wagner; montage effects, Slavko Vorkapich; film editor, Elmo Veron. Cast: Spencer Tracy, Mickey Rooney, Henry Hull, Leslie Fenton, Gene Reynolds, Edward Norris, Addison Richards, Minor Watson, Jonathan Hale, Bobs Watson, Martin Spellman, Mickey Rentschler, Frankie Thomas, Jimmy Butler, Sidney Miller, Robert Emmett Keane, Victor Killian.

TRULY great picture. The studio which failed A to move us with all the glory, glamour and glitter of the French court at the peak of its brilliance, failed to make us weep for Antoinette as she marched up steps to the death awaiting her at the top, in Boys Town brings lumps to our throats by showing us mortar being mixed, beams being sawed, bricks placed upon bricks; and makes us applaud a close-up of the building which the motion picture camera erected while we watched. Perhaps in some other picture a building has been applauded, but this was the first time I had applauded one. The building was a symbol, a physical realization of the faith of a great man who had endeared himself to me; it was to be a factory whose raw material was homeless boys, and product men. First, the picture shows us what homeless boys really are, the evil the world does to them and the evil they will do the world if they are to grow to manhood without knowing what home means or being exposed to its beneficial influence.

Simplicity Is Its Strength . . .

DURELY a social preachment—in the abstract, unpromising story material for motion picture entertainment—Boys Town comes to the screen as a gripping human document with all the elements which make for box-office success. In real life it is the realized dream of Father Flanagan, a noble priest who was present in person at the preview; on the screen its motivating force is the spiritual quality, the great understanding and the superb artistry of Spencer Tracy in the role of Father Flanagan. It is not the story which gives life to the picture, not the sermon it preaches which makes it entertaining, for sermons are not box-office. The picture gets its strength from the simplicity of its appeal to the audience, the emotional response it compels, the sympathetic interest it creates. It achieves what all pictures should aim at achieving—the successful presentation in simple terms of story material with which the audience entertains itself. That means picture making at the peak of perfection. Take the instance of the emotional response to the erection of the building which the camera wizardry of Slavko Vorkapich raises before our eyes. Previous sequences had made us yearn for the successful culmination of Spencer's efforts to get money for his home for the

homeless. We fail to see how he can be successful against the odds he faces. Then we see a plow cut a furrow and shovels at work, the skeleton of a building, the completed building. The picture has made Spencer's dream ours, and our dream is realized. Our emotions rose in step with the rising building, and tears topped them as the roof topped the building.

Harmonious Emotional Pattern . . . WHEN I view a picture which moves me as profoundly as Boys Town did, I have difficulty in getting down to earth in writing my review of it. I still see it as a whole, this morning after; as an even, smooth, harmonious emotional pattern composed of brilliant pieces which lose their individual identities in the completeness of the effect the whole pattern creates. For instance: I suppose Cedric Gibbon's settings should be mentioned, but I did not see them, never gave a thought to them. I was aware only of the human drama being enacted by real people in their natural surroundings. Nor did I see actors, not even Spencer Tracy, the actor; I saw only a great person with a great mission. I was not a critic sitting out in front. Ordinary pictures make me one, and during their running I make mental notes of things to write in my reviews. Not so last evening. One cannot find flaws in a perfect picture nor pick out high spots in one composed wholly of them. Producer Considine's Irish heart seemed to have got into the picture, his masterpiece to date: and in his direction the gifted Norman Taurog revealed again his deep understanding of child psychology and his skill in handling children. Those who had a hand in building the screen play did not have a standard story to tell, one with hero, villain, romance and thrills; but it was what they did with what they did have that made the great results possible. Dore Schary collaborated with Eleanore Griffin in writing the original story, and with John Meehan in writing the screen play. All Sidney Wagner's photography was good, some of his shots superb. In the long cast there are no weak spots. Leslie Fenton does a dramatic scene brilliantly. Mickey Rooney, of course, is outstanding. Henry Hull handles an important part splendidly, and Edward Norris, Addison Richards and Jonathan Hale register strongly. It goes without saying that all the children gave perfect performances.

BETTY BURBRIDGE

... Writer ...

Republic

Children always do. and begin to slip only when they begin to learn how to act.

ANOTHER YOU MUST SEE . . .

● HOLD THAT CO-ED: Twentieth Century-Fox; producer. Darryl F. Zanuck; associate producer. David Hempstead; director, George Marshall; screen play, Karl Tunberg, Don Ettlinger and Jack Yellen; original story, Karl Tunberg and Don Ettlinger; music and lyrics, Mack Gordon, Harry Revel, Lew Pollack, Lew Brown, Sidney Clare, Jule Styne and Nicholas Castle; dances, Nicholas Castle and Geneva Sawyer; photographer, Robert Planck; art directors, Bernard Herzbrun and Hans Peters; set decorator, Thomas Little; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes, Royer; musical director, Arthur Lange. Cast: John Barrymore, George Murphy, Marjorie Weaver, Joan Davis, Jack Haley, George Barbier, Ruth Terry, Donald Meek, Johnny Downs, Paul Hurst, Guinn Williams, Brewster Twins, Bill Benedict, Frank Sully, Charles Wilson, Glenn Morris, Dora Clement, Russell Hicks, Ruth Warren, Forbes Murray, Harry Hayden, Clem Bevans, John Dilson, John Elliott, Frank Jaquet, Fred Kohler, Jr.

BOX-OFFICE bull's-eye. About the time it is A released throughout the land, two topics of conversation will lead all others—football and politics. Hold That Co-Ed is about both, and that should give it a good start with any audience. I would not say it is the best football picture I ever saw, for to reach that decision would put too great a strain on my memory to recall all the others, but I am quite sure that you and I never saw a better one. For downright cleverness, few pictures I have seen in years can approach it. It satirizes both football and politics, is funny enough to keep the audience laughing heartily nearly all the time it is running, yet there are flashes of football in it that will stir the sporting instincts of any follower of the game. As always is the case when satire is handled cleverly, Hold That Co-Ed takes itself seriously and lets the audience do the laughing. As is quite appropriate for a football picture, the script for this one came out of a huddle participated in by Karl Tunberg and Don Ettlinger, who provided the original story, and who had Jack Yellen to help out on the screen play. A man named Yellen certainly ought to be able to contribute something worthwhile to any screen play which embraces both college football and a political campaign.

Joan Davis Is Triumphant . . .

CAMPAIGN for the United States Senate can A create excitement, but it has no way of building to a last-second climax that will bring the populace howling to its feet, so that feature of the picture is entrusted to its football element. True to football picture traditions, this one perches a last-second victory on the banner of the college we want to see win, but not until you see Hold That Co-Ed have you seen a climax which out-thrills all that have gone before it and makes you shriek with laughter while you are tingling with excitement. Joan Davis, that extremely clever comedienne who scores a triumph in every part she plays, is the co-ed whom the opposing team fails to hold. I can recall nothing else I have seen on the screen as funny and exciting as her battle with a gale to score the deciding touchdown. And certainly I can recall no more brilliant comedy performance than that of our great American Hamlet, John Barrymore. The versatility of the man is amazing. I am sure Jack had the time of his life playing the part. As well as being one of the greatest legitimate actors the modern stage has developed, he also is a peerless comedian. In this picture he plays a part without doubt inspired by the late Huey Long of Louisiana. Jack is governor of an un-named state and carries on much as Long did.

George Marshall's Fine Direction . . .

DD the superbly graceful dancing of George Murphy to the fun and thrills of Hold That Co-Ed, and you have something. Besides being one of the screen's finest dancers, Murphy acts acceptably any part assigned him and also possesses an agreeable singing voice which he knows how to use. His singing in Hold That Co-Ed impressed me to the point of suspicion, so I telephoned Milt Howe out at the Fox studio and asked him if George really sang or if the voice was dubbed in. Milt assured me that George did the singing. And that settles it, for Milt is a member of Harry Brand's publicity staff, and no member of a studio publicity staff ever was known to tell an untruth or even to exaggerate. But—sssh!— I am going to ask George if he can produce another witness. Under the direction of George Marshall all the members of the long cast turn in nice performances. Direction throughout could not have been excelled. I have never known Marshall previously to have revealed such a keen sense of humor, a fact explained, no doubt, by his failure to have been given scripts which provided him with opportunities to display his full ability for developing all the possibilities of comedy situations. Music figures largely in the production, all the singing numbers being spirited, tuneful and full of college atmosphere. Robert Planck's photography has fine quality, some shots being remarkable examples of skilful use of the camera.

COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER . . .

● TOO HOT TO HANDLE; MGM; producer, Lawrence Weingarten; director, Jack Conway; screen play, Laurence Stallings and John Lee Mahin; based on story by Len Hammond; musical score, Franz Waxman; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; special effects, Arnold Gillespie; photographer, Harold Rosson; montage effects, John Hoffman; film editor, Frank Sullivan. Cast: Clark Gable, Myrna Loy, Walter Pidgeon, Walter Connolly, Leo Carrillo, Johnny Hines, Virginia Weidler, Betty Ross Clarke, Henry Kolker, Marjorie Main, Gregory Gaye, Al Shean, Willie Fung, Lillie Mui, Patsy O'Connor.

ENTERTAINING, but nothing extraordinary. While the film industry is spending one million dollars in a crazy effort to undo the damage too much talking has done, Metro gives us this picture with a story subject which cries for camera treatment, and crams it to the neck with dialogue which the director makes more aggravating by having his players shout it at us. The idea behind the picture is a good one; newsreels are part of our everyday life, they interest us and it would interest us to get a glimpse behind the scenes to see how the great newsreel organizations

work, how they manage to get an explosion in Chicago, a parade in Rome and a sandstorm on the Gobie Desert on the same reel. Too Hot to Handle, as far as I know, is the first picture to tackle the subject. To do it justice—which is another way of saying, to develope all the box-office value there is in it—the subject should have been given the right of way and the players presented as of secondary consideration, as people whose single idea is to shoot a scene and get the film to the head office with the least possible delay. That would have made the characters heroic and the picture dramatic.

Rather Amusing Entertainment . . .

IIIHAT the picture shows us is what a slick fellow Clark Gable is in outslicking the other fellows who are competing with him where photographic news is happening. As such it is amusing entertainment, but comes a long way short of being the arresting picture it would have been if full advantage had been taken of the possibilities of the story material. If we are to accept it as revealing true conditions, there will be a lessening of our respect for those who go to the far corners of the world to send back pictures of what is going on there. It is all right to treat in similar manner subjects we already know quite a lot about—as, for instance, Century treats football in Hold That Co-Ed—but as Too Hot to Handle is the first comprehensive treatment of the newsreel industry any studio has given us, it is reasonable that we should accept it as an authentic presentation of the manner in which the industry operates. However, this review will be more enlightening, perhaps, if I confine myself to a discussion of what the picture presents and say no more about what I feel it should have presented.

Outstanding In the Cast . . .

NEXT to the noise it makes, the outstanding feature of the picture is its wide geographic sweep and the many visually interesting scenes it contains. If it had been written for the camera instead of for the microphone, the same story could have been told with at least half as much dialogue as we are forced to listen to. Clark Gable gives his standard performance and probably will hold the sympathy of his fans in spite of the character's low ethical standards. Myrna Loy was up against it to make us believe such a wholly feminine person could perform deeds it would be heroic for men to perform, but she gets away with it and without loss of her feminine charm. Walter Pidgeon contributes another of his dependable performances, and Walter Connolly, always the complete master of any situation in which he finds himself, makes a big contribution to whatever satisfaction the picture will give. Leo Carrillo, an actor who never fails to delight his audience, has a prominent part which he makes one of the outstanding features of the production. Marjorie Main and Henry Kolker are others whose work is to be commended. Laurence Stallings and John Lee Mahin, writers of the screen play, do not come within the scope of my criticism of the story, without doubt

having given the studio just what it wanted. The same goes for Jack Conway's direction. He gives the script vigorous treatment, although I wish he had coaxed his players to put less vigor in their delivery of dialogue.

FUNNY, BUT NOT CLEVER . . .

● ROOM SERVICE; RKO release of a Pandro S. Berman production; stars Groucho, Chico and Harpo Marx; director, William A. Seiter; screen play by Morrie Ryskind; from play by John Murray and Allan Boretz as produced by George Abbott; musical director, Roy Webb; photography, J. Roy Hunt; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Al Herman; assistant to the director, Philip Loeb; gowns, Renie; assistant director, James Anderson; film editor, George Crone, Supporting cast: Lucille Ball, Ann Miller, Frank Albertson, Donald MacBride, Cliff Dunstan, Philip Loeb, Philip Wood, Alexandro Asro, Charles Halton.

BOISTEROUS, elemental farce which follows the stage play closely (Louella Parsons); which does not follow the stage play closely (Edwin Schallert). I am in no position to settle the matter as—as I have stated before—I keep away from plays I know I am going to see on the screen, the idea being that I wish to see the pictures as film audiences will see them, without any previous knowledge of what is going to happen. All I know was that RKO had paid \$255, 000 for the Room Service screen rights. After viewing the picture I feel that the RKO money was not spent in a manner to yield the greatest possible return in the way of story material for the Marx Brothers. For the same amount I am sure the studio could have purchased two hundred and fifty-five farces equally as funny, a supply of story material which, at two pictures a year, would have lasted the Marx trio one hundred and twenty-seven years, six months, which would prove quite long enough for one trio to stick together. Not that Room Service is not funny; it is, but it comes a long way short of having a quarter of a million dollars' worth of cleverness in it.

Lacking In Basic Appeal . . .

AMONG the many things ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent of film audiences are not interested in is the difficulty a Broadway producer has in putting on a play. Room Service therefore lacks basic general appeal; the viewer this side of the Hudson cannot project himself into it. He merely can look at it from a distance—and the farther the distance, the more agreeable to his ears will be the noise it makes. I am basing my criticism on the terrific cost of the story material, a consideration, of course, which is of interest only to Hollywood. Of general interest, however, is the fact that Room Service does not even resemble a motion picture. The film industry is spending one million dollars in what will prove a vain effort to restore the prosperity it once enjoyed. It is not aware that it talked itself out of prosperity, that with such pictures as this one it is increasing its illness while it is applying what it considers to be a remedy. Photographed dialogue never can equal photographed action in box-office value. An audience can laugh without restraint at a visually funny scene. During the showing of Room Service laughter was

checked by the constant flow of dialogue. The only completely satisfactory picture is one which permits the audience to laugh without feeling it is losing anything.

Seiter Gives Good Direction . . .

 $\mathbf{D}UT$ taking the picture as it is and not as it should **B** be, we have to credit Director Seiter with developing all the values the script contained. He keeps it moving at the rapid pace a farce must have to be successful, and overcomes in a large measure the handicap imposed upon him by the restricted area in which he had to work, most of the action being confined to one room. Another difficulty was the overdose of dialogue, but into the stream of talk Seiter managed to inject some visual flashes of humor which added greatly to the fun. As for the Marx Brothers, I do not think they were good casting in the various parts. They do better in a production with greater physical sweep, such as A Night At the Opera. The Room Service background is too restricted for their brand of comedy. Donald MacBride, a member of the New York stage cast, gives his stage performance in the picture, and demonstrates, by contributing the worst characterization of the lot, that stage technique does not belong on the screen. If Pan Berman, head of RKO production, is ambitious to make a record he can point to with pride, he'd better get back into the motion picture business. Given motion picture treatment, Room Service could have become an outstanding contribution to the season's gaiety.

PATRONS ARE AWAITING IT . . .

• SONS OF THE LEGION; Paramount picture and release; director, James Hogan; associate producer, Stuart Walker; original story and scren play by Lillie Hayward, Lewis Foster and Robert F. McGowan; photography, Charles Schoenbaum; art direction, Hans Dreier and William Flannery; edited by Anne Bauchens; sound recording, Hugo Grenzbach and Glenn Rominger; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: Lynne Overman, Evelyn Keyes, Donald O'Connor, Elizabeth Patterson, William Frawley, Tim Holt, Billy Cook, Billy Lee, Edward Pawley, Richard Tucker, Tom Dugan, Keith MacKenzie.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

FILM with both a purpose and a tie-up is Sons A of the Legion. Produced with the cooperation of American Legion officials, it treats with the expanding of the auxiliary for sons of the ex-soldiers, is to be released during the week of September 18 when the legionnaires are assembled in Los Angeles for their national convention. The national release of the picture will signal the start of a nation-wide campaign to enlist eligible youngsters in the organization, for the picture is couched in simple enough terms for children to absorb the information and succumb to the enthusiasms it would impart. Hence, there is a wide public already awaiting the film, in sympathy with its viewpoints and sentiments and disposed to view it favorably. This favorably disposed group will doubtless be augmented by many patrons who will view the film as a step toward acquiring a share of \$250,000. This seems to be a perfect production and distribution set-up. I am not certain there is any

object in discussing the film in the light of artistic merit. However, there may be a few who will view the picture objectively, so here goes.

Characters Become Mouthpieces . . .

ONSIDERING the material with which he had to Work, Director James Hogan has done a clean piece of story telling. The more than fifty youngsters who dominate the action, he has handled with understanding and directorial skill, getting spirited and sensitive performances from them; and the adult scenes he has imbued with the flavor of homeliness now coming into favor in picture treatments. Those of the public who are not under one of the influences cited, however, are likely to find the picture too naive for their approbation. All the good little boys are very good, the bad ones very bad-except the waif who comes under the influence of the young legionnaires and forthwith becomes absorbed in reading the Bible. Similarly all the papa legionnaires are good men and true, while the one culprit is surely a devil. There is this consideration too—many spectators may not like being preached at, even assuming they are in complete accord with what is being preached. For the picture is propaganda, however you look at it. More than once the characters obviously become mouthpieces to dispense the messages of the authors, very evidently so when a foreign youngster delivers a rhetorical suummary, extemporaneously, of why he wants to be an American citizen, and, inferentially, a legionnaire. This may be effective propaganda, but it is bad drama. I must point out, however, that this is my personal reaction. This sort of thing may be right up the alley of a great many people. Exhibitors should be able to anticipate the reaction of their patrons.

Children Are Clever . . .

O'Connor as the little tough boy. His recital of the David and Goliath proverb in gangster vernacular thoroughly tickled the audience. Billy Cook and Billy Lee do well, and a mere tot, Keith MacKenzie, son of the American Legion national conference director, held his own with the best of them. Lynn Overman, droppig his wisecracking mannerisms, gives a performance of admirable sincerity as a father who cannot join the legion because of a dishonorable discharge from the army. Tim Holt is personable as the youthful organizer of the movement, and Evelyn

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Keyes, Elizabeth Patterson and William Frawley are well cast.

LOVE VERSUS A CAREER . . .

 UNDER THE BIG TOP; Monogram picture and release; director, Karl Brown; Scott R. Dunlap in charge of production; associate producer, William Lackey; screen play by Marion Orth; based on Llewellyn Hughes' original story; photography, Gilbert Warrenton; sound, Karl Zint; musical director, Abe Meyer; film editor, Russell Schoengarth. Cast: Anne Nagel, Marjorie Main, Jack LaRue, Grant Richards, George Cleveland, Herbert Rawlinson, Rolfe Sedan, Betty Compson, Snowflake, Harry Harvey, Charlene Wyatt, Speed Hansen.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

MONOGRAM gives us this time a tale of circus life in which a complication arises when a trapeze artist, a girl whose career has been nurtured by a domineering aunt, proceeds to fall in love. Highlights of the picture are some forceful moments of characterization contributed by Marjorie Main as the steely aunt, owner of the circus, especially one in which she challenges an unruly lion and, chair in hand, forces it into its cage. Considerable color surrounding circus life has been created, a menagerie of animals, trapeze performances and the like featuring in the story. There are a good many stock shots, but they are well matched with the others and are interesting in themselves. The story unfolds smoothly, albeit the latter portion lags in tempo a bit, and the ending is rather summary and arbitrary. Judged by the standards set by the run of independent productions, however, the quality of the picture is generally good, and it should prove a satisfactory dualer.

They Float Through the Air . . .

NF THE players, George Cleveland stands out in his sympathetic portrayal of an old clown. Anne Nagel, as the girl, is easy and pleasant, though she might have made her characterization more vivid. Jack LaRue is efficiently glum as a disappointed lover, and Grant Richards, if somewhat mannered, is satisfactory as the lover. Old timers will be pleased to see Betty Compson and Herbert Rawlinson again, both doing good work. Little Charlene Wyatt plays capably the star performer as a child. Marjorie Main, as I have said, has moments of fine force, thought at other times the script requires her to reveal a tender heart too suddenly and too profusely for conviction. A fault of Marion Orth's screen play is that it permits such abrupt emotional transitions, and also crams story developments into single scenes when such developments need spacing. In his direction Karl Brown's best touches are to be found in the action scenes, as when the circus burns in an early part of the picture. Gilbert Warrenton, photographer, in addition to his ingenious employment of the stock shots, has contrived some effective montage here and there. For some reason the performers in the air have been filmed so that their movements are noticeably slower than they normally would be. This makes the artists appear to float through the air with a little too much of the greatest of ease, tends to simplify their stunts and to slow down the movement of the

story. I do not know the technical problems involved, but if these scenes could be speeded up it would be to the advantage of the picture. (mo 82 sm)

SHANGHAI IS BACKGROUND . . .

 SHADOWS OVER SHANGHAI; Fine Arts; producer, Franklyn Warner; associate producer-director, Charles Lamont; assistant director, Ralph Slosser; art director, Ralph Berger; cameraman, Arthur Martinelli; film editor, Bernard Loftus. Cast: James Dunn, Ralph Morgan, Linda Gray, Robert Barrat, Paul Sutton, Edward Woods, Edwin Mordant, Chester Gan, Victor Wong, Edward Keane, Billy Bevan, Wm. Haade, Richard Loo, Victor Young.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

NE of two initial productions to issue from the newly formed Fine Arts organization, Shadows Over Shanghai turns out to be a melodrama with not a little atmosphere and suspense. The story has the advantage of being topical, the plot involving the bombing of Shanghai, and into the yarn has gone a good bit of fictional invention. A young Russian teacher at a mission near Shanghai, is entrusted by her brother with the delivery of an amulet to a party in San Francisco, upon the receipt of which the party will release five million dollars, intended to aid China in the war. The brother has already met with a mishap at the hands of one who knows of his possession of the amulet, having been shot down from the air while flying his plane. The rest of the story recounts the harrowing adventures of the girl and two confidants as they attempt to elude a crafty Japanese army officer on the one hand and an unscrupulous former secret agent of Russia on the other, and to obtain passage from the battle-torn Shanghai. There are evidences of a low production budget in the film, which does not possess the technical finesse of major studio pictures, but nevertheless the oriental atmosphere of Shanghai is sufficiently established, as well as a mood of ominousness.

They Forget Quickly ...

BOMBARDMENT scene is truly a booming A affair. Many of the shots in the sequence are obviously of the newsreel variety, and some of not very good photographic texture, but they lend excitement. Charles Lamont, director and associate producer, has invested the adventures of his people with the requisite movement and tenseness, and paced well the story as a whole. I have never been able to understand why directors of melodramas so frequently allow their characters to recover almost at once from the effects of shocking incidents, as when the characters here are seen to smile but a moment after a man has been blown to bits in the next room, but maybe I am being finicky. The show is generally well cast. James Dunn's breezy style is applied advantageously to the role of a newspaper cameraman, and Ralph Morgan is excellent as an American participant in the difficulties. Good stock performances are given by Robert Barrat and Paul Sutton, as, respectively, the Russian and the Japanese officer. Linda Gray is adequate as the heroine. The picture as a whole is a standard commercial product of its kind, and is suitable for

the double bills. The original story was by Richard B. Dale, screen-played by Joseph Hoffman.

MOVEMENT IS GOOD . . .

● ROAD DEMON: 20th-Fox production; features Henry Arthur, Joan Valerie, Henry Armetta, Tom Beck and Bill Robinson; directed by Otto Brower; associate producer, Jerry Hoffman; original screen play, Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; photography, Edward Snyder; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Boris Leven; film editor, Jack Murray; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Supporting cast: Jonathan Hale, Murray Alper, Edward Marr, Lon Chaney, Jr., Inez Palange, Johnny Pironne, Jr., Eleanor Virzie, Betty Greco.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

SECOND in a series of sports pictures to be produced by Twentieth Century-Fox, Road Demon is about as entertaining a film on the subject of motor racing as could be made. Roaring racing cars take over a good deal of footage in the picture, but these sequences are well worked out with respect to suspense and human interest values. Three racers, in the employ of a crooked gambler, have been maneuvering their cars so as to force promising contestants to "kiss the wall." In the final race the son of a racer who has been murdered by one of this outfit, is at the wheel. Robert Ellis and Helen Logan have done a clean job of story telling, events following each other with refreshing directness, and Otto Brower has kept the action brisk, the pace steady, in his direction. It is doubtful if the wrangling in Italian between Gambini and his wife held sufficient humor to justify its interpolation, but movement as a whole is good. The Gambini family, which also made an appearance in the first of the series, provides considerable mirth in the present opus, the man and wife, their activities unknown to each other, selling 120 per cent of shares in the racing car they have been persuaded to buy, and then praying that the car will lose. Not for (Mabel Keefer kindly skip a line) sophisticates, but others will find no little fun and excitement in Road Demon.

There Are Two Schools . . .

NEWCOMER, Henry Arthur, makes his appear-A ance in the sizable part of a brash young driver, and invests the role with sparkle and exuberance. He has a few mannerisms which should be watched before the camera, but his performance as a whole was pleasing. Expert Henry Armetta scored many laughs as Papa Gambini, ably assisted by Inez Palange, playing Mama Gambini. Tom Beck, Joan Valerie and several others are satisfactory in not very demanding parts. Bill Robinson contributes a rhythmic interlude of tap dancing, and young Johnny Pironne, Jr., fingers his accordion with especailly good effect this time, in as much as his playing provides background music for a race between two trucks on a highway. This piece of ingenuity led me to hope that the other racing portions would be accompanied by some of the punchy music such as that with which Samuel Kaylin has scored the titles. But only the roaring of engines and the screaming of tires accompany these sequences. I recognize that

there are two schools of thought on the music-vs.noise issue. One maintains—and I subscribe to this
view—that music cannot only add dramatic emphasis to a picture, but also can lend a sensory pleasure
to an evening's entertainmet. The other school,
among which apparently are many producers, believes that noise is an actual commodity, that people
like it so much they pay money at the box-office because they want to hear it. But I fear I will not be
convinced of this until lines are forming again in
front of theatres.

IS VERY CYNICAL AFFAIR . . .

● FUGITIVES FOR A NIGHT; RKO picture and release; features Frank Albertson and Eleanor Lynn; director, Leslie Goodwins; producer, Lou Lusty; screen play, Dalton Trumbo; based on a story by Richard Wormser; musical director, Russell Bennett; photography, Frank Redman; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Howard Campbell; gowns, Renie; sound recording, Earl A. Wolcott; edited by Desmond Marquette. Supporting cast: Allan Lane, Bradley Page, Adrianne Ames, Jonathan Hale, Russell Hicks, Paul Guilfoyle.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

IF YOU are one of those clamoring for the "low down' on Hollywood, Fugitives for a Night should contribute to your illumination. It is an oh, oh, so cynical exposé of the inner workings of filmland, in which most of the characters are hard as nails, and all that is loathsome in Hollywood values is flaunted aloft like a dirty shirt. As one cog in the Hollywood machinery, I thought the whole thing a little overdone; the characters and the values do exist in filmland, but not in such concentrated forms. When a picture deals with Hollywood or with any other unusual locality or industrial set-up, we expect the film to treat of its subject in a representative way, and I do not believe Fugitives for a Night truthfully reveals the spirit of the film capital and its workers. Anyway, the central character is a stooge, a fellow who is a cross between a court jester and an aid-decamp to a picture star, keeping his employer out of jams, seeing that he is on the set on time, helping in publicity stunts, and the like.

Has Measure of Validity . . .

CEEMS that this stooge lives a pretty humiliating Dexistence, must hear others say of him as he passes them on the lot, "He's nobody," be snubbed by other players and contemptuously upbraided by studio executives. I have never observed cinema people to be as generally unkind as they are here pictured. Moreover, with some of our fellow countrymen having labored in stinking coal mines for ten hours a day since they were children, and others glad to get a berth on the WPA, I can scarcely conceive the stooge's lot as being so wretched. He dresses well, has a comfortable apartment, and gets invited to swanky parties. The stooge, however, regards his position as such a miserable one, that he buys a greasy-spoon hamburger joint ere the story's close. Be that as it may, there is a measure of validity in the disagreeable aspects of Hollywood which are depicted. Dalton Trumbo has done some witty and

trenchant screen writing in several scenes. Representative quips: "Five thousand people in Hollywood have been ruined because of one part in a picture," and, from a producer, "One slice of ham is as good as another, except that one is fresher than the other." Yarn Misses Fire ...

THE weakness of the story, of which Richard Wormser wrote the original, is that, despite its early cynicism, it goes naive with a conventional mystery shooting and then falters about until it is time for a finish, which is effected without much of a climax. For several sequences the boy and girl are shown beating their way to Hollywood from a desert resort, where the shooting occurred, by means of a stolen car, a freight train and such. While they are riding atop the train, under the stars, would seem to be a good time for some philosophizing on some sane values in living, as contrasted with the distorted ones they had found in Hollywood. But nothing of the kind takes place; the two just beat their way from one vehicle to another and squeeze hands a bit. I have a suspicion that some editing might help the concluding portion. Apropos, in an early part the stooge leaves his apartment for a party at his employer's home, and, as the next shot shows the employer, we assume the time is the same night, while it is supposed to be the next morning.

Again the Glass Brick . . .

FRANK ALBERTSON does everything with the part of the stooge that could be done, displaying technical accomplishment and a likeable personality. Eleanor Lynn played with freshness and ease as a young publicity worker, and Allan Lane, Bradley Page and Adrianne Ames are efficient. Jonathan Hale, with skilful use of nuance, makes outstanding his role of a police captain. During moments such as Hale's inquisitorial scene at the desert resort, Director Leslie Goodwin seems to be handling his material in an imaginative and sure way; too bad the film as a whole did not turn out to be better than just fair double-bill timber. A distressing feature of the picture is the appearance of that film executive office set with the glass brick embellishments, which I have seen in several films now. They might at least knock out the glass brick.

NEW FAMILY SERIES . . .

● THE HIGGINS FAMILY; a Republic picture; associate producer, Sol C. Siegel; directed by Gus Meins; screen play by Paul Gerard Smith and Jack Townley; original story by Richard English; production manager, Al Wilson; photographed by Jack Marta; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; film editor, Ernest Nims; art director, John Victor Mackay; musical score by Cy Feuer; costumes by Irene Saltern. Cast: James Gleason, Lucile Gleason, Russell Gleason, Lynn Roberts, Harry Davenport, William Bakewell, Paul Harvey, Wallie Clark, Sally Payne, Richard Tucker, Doreen McKay, Franklin Parker, Gay Seabrook.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

WELCOME to the fold, the latest of the family series, and a worthy newcomer at that. The Higgins Family series opens auspiciously with a completely charming insight into the woes and weal of

the Higgins outfit—and what an outfit! Director Gus Meins has woven a neat little picture out of the average daily doings of an average family. There is luckily no attempt to insinuate villainy and dark deeds as we find them in other family series. The plot is motivated by coincidence and circumstance, replete with fresh situations and good dialogue. It is to Director Mein's credit that he never strains for effect, that he lets his camera leisurely tell a leisurely story, and all of it is done in the best of taste.

Story and Dialogue Good . . .

BASED on the original by Richard English, Paul Gerard Smith and Jack Townley have fashioned a nice little yarn which hangs together well, moves swiftly and quietly and is chock-full of novel situations and good dialogue. Some of the gags given Russell Gleason, the mechanical-minded young son of the Higgins family, are priceless. His phone-radio attachment, whereby all phone conversation is amplified through the radio, garnered lots of laughs. And his electric short-circuiting was well-devised business also. The story about the Higginses is simplicity itself. It strikes a common note with the audience because of its very homeliness.

Acting Outstanding . . .

ACTING honors are pretty evenly divided all around. Jimmie Gleason was never better and funnier; and Lucille, his wife, as the better half of the Higgins family, rates top honors too. Harry Davenport, as Grandpa Higgins, the perpetual house guest and persona non grata, steals picture honors as well as the picture. He is a wonderful addition to the Higgins combination, a sly, wicked grin in his eyes that makes his role refreshing and interesting. Young Russell Gleason is also part of the Higgins menage as the inventive and somewhat destructive brains of the family. He has all the accomplishment and finesse of his veteran father, shows good camera presence and timing. Lynn Roberts, a newcomer to this reviewer, is a capable young actress who can do weightier roles. She is eye-appealing as well as being a capable little actress. Young William Bakewell has long been a secret favorite here, a young man who deserves good roles and who never seems to get them. Paul Harvey as Thornwald, the irate food company executive, and Wallie Clark as Jimmie's dyspeptic boss, add to the formidableness of the cast. Doreen McKay stands out as a long-suffering librarian in love with Higgins, Jr.

Production Values There . . .

AS THE first of an impending series The Higgins Family leaves little to be desired. Here is a wealth of acting talent arrayed, set against a carefully concocted background. This seems to be a kind of object lesson of how to make a good picture under two and one-half million dollars. There is more pathos, more drama, more humor and more plain good cinema here than in some of the picture's more pretentious counterparts. Associate Producer Sol Siegel has given his family series an excellent send-off. Murray Seldeen did a creditable job of editing.

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I understand from reliable sources that Warner's Hollywoood Theatre demanded a picture on short order and *Higgins* was rushed in about ten minutes after Mr. Seldeen got through winding the theatre print on the last reel spool. It is no condemnation to say, therefore, that the picture is a trifle too long, and action near the end could be curtailed. All of which proves that Director Meins did not shoot from the cuff but gave his picture careful thought. I have been hissed at for saying that the size of a picture budget had nothing to do with its quality. I will let *Higgins* speak for me.

NOTHING NEW IN THIS ONE . . .

● THE RENEGADE RANGER; RKO picture and release; starring George O'Brien: director, David Howard; associate producer, Bert Gilroy; screen play by Oliver Drake; based on story by Bennett Cohen; photography, Harry Wild; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Lucius Croxton; musical director, Roy Webb; sound recording, Hugh McDowell, Jr; edited by Frederic Knudston. Supporting players: Rita Hayworth, Tim Holt, Ray Whitley, Lucio Villegas, William Royle, Cecilia Callejo, Neal Hart, Monte Montague, Robert Kortman, Charles Stevens, James Mason, Tom London.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph ORIGINALITY is something the average cinemagoer has begun to expect of Westerns within the recent past. An attempt to bring them up-to-date, infuse them with newness, and give them fresh angles, is clearly discernible in some of the latest horse operas. And if not a certain topicalness at least a little different twist in plot. Basically, Westerns are all the same. It is the twist-difference which enables us to distinguish one from the other. The Renegade Ranger, a George O'Brien effort, is not one of these. I have seen this picture a dozen times before. I recognized the characters as they came on the screen. In the present instance this is a pity because this film is nicely mounted and is carefully directed, edited, scored and produced. Standing out is Film Editor Frederic Knudtson's excellent timing and pacing. He had to keep Rangers moving and he had to keep the audience interest. This he does well.

Production Values Good . . .

PRODUCER Bert Gilroy has set a lavish hand on this picture. The cast is a large one and the picture resplendent with good riding and acting shots. The backgrounds are good and the sets are designed with taste to the credit of Van Nest Polglase. But I think Gilroy slipped when he passed the present script. It lacks life. Rita Hayworth is a young lady of comely looks and good talent. She deserves a better chance and better roles. For my money, she stands head and shoulder above the dozen or so Western leading ladies I have seen during the last few months. She has good camera presence and has finesse, a quality often lacking in younger players assigned to this kind of role.

The Case of O'Brien . . .

AS I have written before, Mr. O'Brien gave what in my estimation was one of the finest performances I have ever seen in Sunrise. It is logical to assume that his acting has improved since that picture was

made by F. W. Murnau over ten years ago. He deserves better roles and better parts, up to the standard of his abilities. Relegated to the corral and hitching post, as he has been for some seasons now, I think he is wasted. It is either a sorry commentary on what Hollywood does to its players by way of burning up their talents or his performance in that film is to the everlasting glory and credit of Murnau's genius. In either case Mr. O'Brien deserves a chance. And I am not his press agent.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

That Beethoven Film . . .

WELL informed member of the Warner Brothers A organization assures me that this studio has definitely decided to make a Life of Beethoven. If not a Life it may prove the Love or Loves of Beethoven. The whole affair, however, may not get under way for another year. There is a script, but from what I understand, it is far from camera-ready and changes galore may be made after a cast has been chosen. The music of course will be Beethoven; however, my informant is not clear on that point. This can be well explained, because the script should determine the choice of the music, but Warners could already lay down a policy of leaving piano music to the piano, and of using only orchestra music for the orchestra. I trust the public will not be treated to a Beethoven film which, in the end, is nothing but a paraphrase on the hackneyed Moonlight Sonata idea in a fashion somewhat of this genre: The slightly deaf master is seen at a piano, wiping away furtive tears. Outside, boy meets girl; more boys meet more girls and their gayety breaks into the sombre music. Alas, the composer no longer hears them or himself. Of course he sees them and so his curly head falls forward on the music rack while someone plays a crashing discord. His shoulders shake convulsively. At that moment in walks a beautiful young woman, etc. The orchestra in the no-man's land of the recording stage strikes up the Moonlight Sonata. At this time, if he has not done so already during the preview, a certain executive turns the sound on to full fury.

Making History Fit . . .

As MY writer friend from Warners remarked: "We shall make history fit: leave that to us. We shall fit it to suit the front office, to suit Mr. Muni, and if there is room left for more fitting, we shall try to please also Leo Forbstein and the other guys from the music department. If you can fit the life of Zola, surely you can fit the life of Beethoven." He laughed. "After all," he continued, "do the historians agree regarding the life of Beethoven?" I told him that there was little discrepancy to be found among the major biographies dealing with Beethoven. He seemed unperturbed. "What if they do? How many people do? I see that Goldwyn has a lot of difficulties in finding the kind of story Jascha Heifetz will

approve. After all, what is the matter with Heifetz? All he has to do is to play the fiddle and be himself. He may be able to do the first. He may find it hard to do the other. These musicians. Ya! Who knows how many affairs Beethoven had until Cosima finally led him up the aisle?" I must have looked rather mystified. He amplified, "You see, we could bring in Liszt playing one of Beethoven's sonatas, perhaps the Moonlight Sonata, while Beethoven clasps Cosima, the daughter of Liszt." At which point I looked at my watch and told him that I had to rush to the office. "By the way," I added to my adieux, "your suggestion of making history fit; that's an idea, because it was Wagner who married Cosima. Cosima was not born yet when Beethoven died."

Four Sisters Scream . . .

THOSE Four Sisters and their flute-swinging papa are noisier even than the whole horde of children in the Constant Nymph. Two things are wrong in the Warner's film which contains such a sparkling score by Max Steiner. The people in the dubbing room, either because they have been ordered, or because of deplorable hardening of their ear drums, have failed to observe proper relationship between dialogue and music. Especially when dialogue is so fast and coming often from half a dozen and more persons, this conflict between loud talk and music is trying. Worse yet, that hand (in the Warner Brothers Theatre) which rocks indeed the cradle of sound, was a hefty one at the preview. Nevertheless, compliments to the veteran composer of the films. Steiner not only provides a gay, spontaneous flowing and bubbling score of fine Scherzo quality, but he has managed to fit in most naturally Schubert's Serenade, and the Haide Roeschen, as well as Mendelssohn's Wings of Song. It seems to me as if Steiner were developing a new and clever technic, whereby he employs famous classics in an organically music-dramatic manner. He adds some amusing touches when those modern daughters of a musician give sweet old Schubert a shot of "hotcha", just to annoy their old man, the Beethoven-minded papa.

Paging the Band . . .

WHATEVER the underlying purpose of the "front office" when featuring a land of the "front office" when featuring a band in Garden of the Moon, they could hardly have done better, because both legitimate and trick playings of this band, headed by Ray Mayer, Joe Venuti and Jerry Colonna, are musically and otherwise most entertaining. Ray Heindorf and Frank Perkins have proven anew their ingenuity as orchestrators. And the recording is remarkably good, especially in those scenes when crowd

> Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D. **OPTOMETRIST**

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noises and finally the popping of dozens of balloons is mixed with the band music. The scene when the orchestra men outblare the unwanted singer is well managed in that sense, as well as John Payne's decidely enjoyable demonstration as a singing band leader. Tunes and lyrics by Harry Warren, Al Dubin and Johnny Mercer have spirit, appeal and a general naturalness, both as to melodies, rhythms and verses.

Iturbi Walks Out . . .

IOSE ITURBI, who was to have played the piano J and conducted in MGM'S Sweethearts, discovered such a lack of affection for the role he was to play that he absented himself for good from the Culver City studio. I am not surprised. Why should Iturbi appear at all in a picture made for the vocal glorification of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald? He is too big an artist to play third fiddle, although his alleged demands for more close-ups, if true, must sound childish, though not more infantile than a lot of demonstrations by camera celebrities. Financially, too, it seems unnecessary to put an Iturbi into a production already starring the two singers. Some day, I am sure, Iturbi will return to the sound-film stage, provided there is a story and a part worthy of his faculties. But I hope he will do more playing than playing and conducting simultaneously. I know he is fond of demonstrating that both can be done at once, and perhaps the sound-film stage, where so many trial recordings can be made until all sounds well, is a better place for repeating this historic stunt than the concert stage.

Chaliapin Himself . . .

TO ANYONE who had known the Fjedor Chali-A apin, the Don Quixote film now being shown must have some merits. It is like looking through yellowed programs or old letters, for they bring back the living memory of voices and gestures, of certain inflections of tone and facial expressions. From that standpoint the English-made Chaliapin film serves as a bridge of time. As a resume of the Cervantes story it is a poor undertaking. Even as an excerpt it will not do. A few scenes are stitched together, but there is little of the original atmosphere. True, there are some fine bits of camera work. However, the Russian accent of the great basso, softened seemingly by a French teacher of English, and the broad Cockey jargon of Robey as Sancho Pansa, are quite disillusioning. The recording of Chaliapin's voice and of Ibert's score, based in part on music by Darkomiszky, sounded so inadequate that I left before the end of the film.



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Producer

a

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d

JOE KANE

Director

"Billy The Kid Returns"

for Republic

Every Other Week

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—October 1, 1938

Vol. 13-No. 18

Guild Victory Over Producers Essential
To Well Being of Pictures

Norman Reilly Raine Tilts His Lance At Some of Editor's Opinions

Film Industry Is Learning It Cannot Be Run Successfully by Politicians

When Sound Came to the Screen It Made Writers and Directors Lazy

... REVIEWS ...

IF I WERE KING ★ GIRLS' SCHOOL ★ YOUTH TAKES A FLING SHARPSHOOTERS ★ THERE GOES MY HEART ★ VALLEY OF THE GIANTS STRAIGHT, PLACE AND SHOW ★ STARLIGHT OVER TEXAS TOUCHDOWN, ARMY ★ THE NIGHT HAWK

Motion Pictures Could Be Your Best Entertainment

John Payne

Current Release

"Garden of the Moon"

Management
WALTER BATCHELER

PARAMOUNT had him under contract for a couple of years, but apparently could see nothing in him; Warners took him over, gave him a big part in Garden of the Moon—and another star is born. John Payne has everything—youth, good looks, intelligence, agreeable singing voice, attractive personality and the knack of making a lounge suit look as formal as a dress suit and a dress suit appear to be as comfortable as a lounge suit. . . . Payne is no flash in the pan. He does not smile and sing his way through Garden of the Moon. He works his passage in a part that calls for a wide assortment of emotional reaction, and he is equal to every demand.—WELFORD BEATON, Hollywood Spectator.

John Beal

Recently Completed:

"I Am The Law" - Columbia

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Present Engagement:

"SOLILOQUY" a new Play Now in Rehearsal For West Coast Opening Prior to New York.

Management Wm. Morris Agency



BVIOUSLY only a united front by the screen's creative workers will overcome the united efforts of the producers to block the institution of reforms which the Guilds champion and which pictures need. Supporting the Guilds' contentions is the basic fact that the producers have made a mess of their jobs, a mess they now are trying to clear up in the silliest possible manner: by spending one million dollars at the outer edge of the audience discontent their product has created, instead of putting more brains into the product itself, thus attacking the cause of the discontent at its source.

To the same extent that picture making is a business are its creative workers business men. Each of them is in business for himself, and only to the extent that the whole business succeeds can he be financially successful as a part of it. Directors, actors and writers realize this. To protect themselves, to insure their future, they have formed themselves into Guilds to guard their interests.

Every forward step the Guilds have taken has been resisted stubbornly by the tightly knit producer organization. If the producers prevail, if discontent prevails in the ranks of creative workers, it will mean more discontent among those who pay to see the pictures, for dissatisfied creative workers cannot create satisfying screen entertainment.

A just man has no honest reason for refusing to bargain with another equally just. Only a man who wants the best of a bargain has a motive for refusing to bargain with one who is motivated by the conviction that his demands are fair and reasonable, and who is strong enough to insist that he be treated fairly.

Present box-office conditions demonstrate that the stability of the film industry will be imperiled if its fate be left solely in the hands of those who almost have wrecked it. The things for which the Guilds stand are things the welfare of the film industry needs. The Spectator can see nothing in the Guild demands from which producers would not profit by granting.

Discontent of exhibitors, legal action by the government, the plight of the box-office are products of the producers' way of doing things. What right have these unwise men to challenge the wisdom of Guild demands? If they had picture wisdom, their pictures would reveal it and there would be no discontent, no legal action, no box-office (slump.

The Guilds should maintain a united front until they have gained all their objectives. And if the producers were sensible they would grant all just Guild demands on the theory that pictures which will make audiences contented cannot be

ON THE ROAD TO MAKE FILMS PAY

By Mabel Keefer

By the old Pacific Ocean, lookin, eastward longingly,
There's an industry a-settin', and I know it thinks o' me;
For the films are in the doldrums, and the movie-bells they say:
"Come you back, you Movie Patron; come you back and make
films pay!"

Come you back and make films pay, You have been too long away: Can't you 'ear the dollars chunkin' as we plan this grand soiree?

On the road to make films pay, Where the movie-fishes play,

An' the sound comes up like thunder from the sound-track 'crost the way.

Ship me to some movie playhouse, where the best is all there is, Where there aren't no class B pictures, and every one's a whiz; Then the movie-bells will call me, an' it's there that I will be—In the good old movie theatre, enjoyin' all I see!

On the road to make films pay, Where nobody can gainsay

w nere novoay can gainsay Movies are good entertainment if they certain laws obey!

On the road to make films pay, Where the movie stars all play,

An' there isn't no sound like thunder when they sing a roundelay!

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made by writers, directors and actor who are discontented.

To qualify as competent to pass judgment on the Guilds' contentions regarding the manner in which the motion picture industry should be conducted, the producers should demonstrate their ability to make the kind of pictures that will attract the audiences without a million-dollar coaxing campaign.

WE TAKE A LOOK AT JITTERBUGGING . . .

WHEN they begin to jitter to music, when jitter-bugs infest all parts of the country and the film bugs infest all parts of the country and the film industry is about to sprinkle some pictures with them, it appeared to me that the situation had become so desperate that I should do something about it. Previously I had dismissed jitterbugging with a line in Mental Meanderings, but that was before I encountered Tom Gallery and was invited by him to attend his jitterbug contest at the Hollywood Legion Stadium last Sunday evening. I accepted the invitation after I had spent the day in wearing down Mrs. Spectator's resistance to the point of finally persuading her to go with me. We had a whale of a time, even though I was not as successful in my efforts to get Mrs. Spectator to leave before it was over as I was in getting her to go. The first thing which impressed me was that at last I had discovered something even noisier than the average talkie. The orchestra's playing and the crowd's cheering vied with one another for top deafening honors, and ended about even. An interesting feature of the goings-on was the manner in which the male bugs turned their partners upsidedown and waved their legs in the air; but I noticed that the most applause was given the couples who kept their four feet on the floor. Apparently girls' legs no longer are your best entertainment. Jitterbugging, I concluded, is merely a social manifestation, athletically insane and too violent to last. But while it lasts I would advise you to take a look at it. But don't try it. We did. When we got home we turned on the radio and jittered, but after almost a minute of it we decided it was not for two people who have been married for thirty years.

RAINE TILTS HIS LANCE . . .

DEAR Welford:
In your current issue you comment on the use of color in pictures, treating with whimsical amusement the fact that producers have the "hallucination" that color photography adds box-office value to a picture. You say, in support of your view, that an elementary rule of all the arts is that there must not be in any art creation an element which isolates itself and draws attention to itself at the expense of the creation as a whole. This may be true; but for you to hold that color in a motion picture violates this rule betrays faulty reasoning. A motion picture is a depiction of nature—and nature is color; therefore, by

the ability to add color we approximate that which we are imitating much more truly than by the use of black and white. Color does add, materially, to audience interest in a picture. Your defective logic arises, I think, in the fact that you assume color still to be a novelty whose newness diverts the audience attention from the story. You should know that that is no longer true. The same faulty reasoning which causes you to condemn dialogue in motion pictures, can be answered similarly—that dialogue adds to the naturalness of people moving, living, walking. Motion pictures are not, as you assume, a separate art; they are an imitation of real life; and the closer we get to real life the more successful the imitation is.

Norman Looks At Pictures . . .

TO BE entirely logical you would have to condemn I color on the stage and dialogue behind the footlights-for what are motion pictures, but a medium for presenting life to audiences precisely as stage plays attempt to do? The difference, ultimately, lies only in this—that motion pictures are enabled to present starring casts simultaneously all over the world. Up to the invention of a means of projecting dialogue, and now color, they were but a pale substitute for life and for stage productions. Now they take their place ahead of stage productions as more nearly, more factually, representative of life. The introduction of the third dimension will be another important step forward. Will you condemn that, too, because it diverts audience interest? In the same vein, you say that if the audience is conscious of color as an isolated contribution to a picture, it attracts attention at the expense of the story; if the audience is not conscious of it, if the story is strong enough to hold the attention of the audience, as it must be, to be a box-office success, the money spent in color is wasted. If this latter, and to me, ridiculous, assumption were true, then what a lot of money has been wasted by all the great artists of history, whose stories in color embellish the world's great art galleries. Why didn't the poor deluded souls tell their stories in black and white, instead of confusing and distracting their viewers from the story by going to the unnecessary expense of using color?. Yours for a common-sense and up-to-date viewpoint . . . and with kind personal regards, of course. -Norman Reilly Raine.

Now It Is Our Turn . . .

BEFORE the screen's surrender to the microphone became complete, Hollywood had begun to look for its writers among those who had achieved success in expressing themselves in the language of literature. As motion picture production had become merely a matter of photographing stories or plays, it was logical for producers to employ authors and playwrights to provide them with story material. Many brilliant writers, therefore, came to Hollywood. Many of them have done brilliant work for the screen. The great improvement talkies have made in the last two or three years is a tribute to the excellent workmanship of those who wrote the scripts. Among the recruits from the field of literature is my friend, Norman Reilly Raine, an author with a national reputation in the world of fiction. Since coming to Hollywood he has mastered the technique of talkie writing, has developed enthusiasm for his work, and has turned out some excellently constructed scripts. As talkies are not screen art, Norman has had no occasion to occupy his mind with the nature of the art, its demands or its limitations, contenting himself with doing the jobs assigned to him and giving his employers what they wanted, as with varying degrees of success have the other authors and playwrights whom the picture studios have brought to Hollywood.

Mission of All Arts . . .

WHILE I do not criticize Norman for his failure to study an art form which II. when it went over wholly to the photographing of stage technique, I challenge his right to discuss it, a right, his letter discloses, he is not qualified to exercise. Only Daniels should come to judgment. He does not qualify his expressions with even a single, "In my opinion;" he makes the flat statement, "motion pictures are not, as you assume, a separate art; they are an imitation of real life." No art is an imitation of real life. It is the mission of all arts to interpret life within the terms of their respective limitations. I do not "assume" that the screen is a separate art. It is a fact established by the various perfect examples of the art we had when pictures were silent, when there was such an art in Hollywood. That was a long time before Norman came to us. If he had come earlier, if he had written even one motion picture, he would know that the screen is the greatest of all the arts, that it is the one art which laughs at the frames within which all others must express themselves. "You assume color still to be a novelty," he writes, thus revealing that he has not taken the trouble to find out what I do assume. As a matter of fact, I have no "assumptions" about screen art; I have convictions born of a score of years of observation and study of the screen as a medium of entertainment.

Box-Office First Consideration . . .

ONE of my convictions is that the sole mission of Hollywood producers Hollywood producers is to regard motion pictures as a business, and to conduct the business in a manner to make it earn the largest profit. I regard the Hollywood Spectator as a paper as wholly commercial as the Wall Street Journal. The box-office is the beacon by which the Spectator steers its course. When color was a novelty with box-office value, the Spectator applauded its use, urged its adoption by all the studios; but at the same time it warned that when the novelty wore off, color would not add anything to the box-office value of a picture because it is not a legitimate element of screen art. Screen art is the foundation upon which the whole Hollywood structure rests. Liberties can be taken with the upper floors from time to time; the use of the color and the telling of stories in dialogue were all right in their day, but when they strained the foundation too much, when they, like Norman, denied the existence of the foundation, the whole structure began to wabble and has been wabbling ever since.

Functions of Screen Art . . .

WE WILL consider another of Norman's pronouncements: "Dialogue adds to the naturalness of people moving, living, walking." What people? I never have seen any people on the screen, nor any movement. I have seen photographs which gave me the illusion that I was seeing people, an illusion heightened by the rapid projection of still photographs on the screen to create, by the persistence of vision, the illusion that I was looking at real movement. The screen is the greatest of all the arts because it is the most intangible, because it has no body or substance, because it is wholly an illusion, so deftly presented that it becomes easy for our imaginations to entertain ourselves with it by supplying everything it lacks—color, depth, voices, movement. Audible dialogue poisons screen art, but, as the Spectator has maintained since the coming of sound, it is all right to administer the poison in small doses to expedite the telling of stories, for in a business whose customers have shown a willingness to accept less than perfection, it would be unwise to make an extra and expensive effort to achieve perfection. But at no time is it permissible to put on the screen anything that can be left to the imagination of the audience. The degree of enjoyment one derives from viewing a motion picture is the degree in which the picture exercises his imagination and gives his intellect a rest. The true motion picture appeals only to the imagination; the talkie appeals to the intellect, thus the motion picture is universal entertainment and the talkie is not. Color photography violates the first rule of screen art by denying the imagination the privilege of painting the picture in the colors which please it most.

If Third Dimension Comes . . .

MOST of Norman's arguments are so absurd that if I disputed them in detail I would have to apologize to my readers. An example: "To be entirely logical you would have to condemn color and dialogue on the stage." He asks me if I would condemn a third dimension as a screen element. If the third dimension should come before the film industry has its sanity restored in the matter of color and audible dialogue-in fact, if the third dimension comes at all—the screen, by dissipating the illusive quality which is its strength and denying our imaginations the privilege of entertaining ourselves with what we see on the screen, then the industry, instead of spending one million dollars once in a lifetime to drum up trade, will have to spend twice that sum every year and then will not get the audiences it needs to sustain it. And if it were not boasting, I would inform my friend Norman that people who have read the Spectator for years can tell him that during the years I have revealed a weakness for making predictions and that thus far my batting average is 1000%.

Why the Box-Office Slump? . . .

 $m{B}^{UT}$ let us assume that Norman is right in everything he claims, that color belongs on the screen, that telling stories completely in dialogue is the best way to tell them; that, in short, I am almost as batty as he dubs me and that no fault can be found with things as they are-for that must be Norman's meaning if what he writes me has meaning. To be consistent with the Spectator's status as a strictly business paper, let us take Norman's thoughts as signifying his complete satisfaction with the present product the film industry is turning out. That would mean, if he be right, that the box-office must be flourishing, that the film business must be booming, that the public must be accepting wholeheartedly what is offered it. If the reverse conditions exist -as I predicted six or seven years ago, they would —it would seem to give me the edge on the argument. The film industry is spending one million dollars in a frantic attempt to drive people into film theatres to keep the ushers from being lonely. Why? Will Norman please tell me? . . . Across the room from my chair hangs an etching autographed to me by the artist. I like it. In monotone it shows a horse and buggy in front of a farm house, beyond it a field of grain, then a row of trees. It is a fine example of the etcher's art. But looking at it through Norman's eyes I see its weakness. The trees should be green, the grain yellow, and there should be mechanical gadgets to permit the horse to swish its tail and snort. . . . But Norman is a good scout and a clever writer. When Hollywood gets back to its business of making motion pictures, he soon will grasp their requirements and hand in brilliantly written scripts.

PICTURES AND THEIR PEOPLE . . .

TWO of those the Spectator rated as poor entertainment, Marie Antoinette and Spawn of the North, are doing very well at the box-office even though many reviewers treated them much the same as I did. ... The papers have it that Jack Mulhall has been given an important part. He never should have been given any other kind. . . . Ralph Graves is another who should be given a break. . . . How the public would go for an anti-war picture if one were showing now. Hollywood refuses to make one because foreign countries might not like it. This country alone would return enormous profits on such a picture. . . . As a recruit from the stage, Walter Kingsford is not running true to form; he likes Hollywood, sings its praises, would rather be idle here than busy on Broadway. Encountered him at a Valley market where both of us were thumbing melons: he was dressed in shorts and a rich brown tan. "Imagine this outfit on Broadway," he said. . . . Buddy Ebsen and Sterling Holloway, as a team in big pictures, would prove a box-office sensation. . . . And with Una Merkel and Joan Davis contributing two brands of feminine comedy, a series of such pictures would

be a series of riots. . . . The name part in Dulcy is tailored exactly to Una's measure. . . . Jitterbug pictures being contemplated now would be out of date before they could be shown. Jitterbugging is too violent to live long. . . . One of the most brilliant minds I have encountered is that of John Burton, actor. . . . Met Lloyd C. Douglas at a dinner party given by Jaime Jalmer at her home. Author Douglas has been represented on the screen by three of his great stories, The Green Light, Magnificent Obsession, White Banners. A fine, companionable fellow with a charming wife; now residing here. . . . Myrna Loy and Clark Gable should not be co-starred again; have made love to one another so often that with the public they have the status of an old married couple; each should be given a new mate. . . . If Harry Cohn could have realized what a prize package he had in John Brahm, that director would be given only big, class A pictures to make. . . . At a preview I caught the tail end of a picture in which Pierre Watkin, playing an attorney for the defense, addresses a jury on behalf of his client; he makes it the finest scene of the sort I have seen in any picture. ... In the same picture Gloria Stuart has her hair pushed up to the top of her head to conform to the latest feminine fancy; she looks a fright. . . . George Cohan's asking \$500,000 for appearance in a picture depicting his life is one way of showing emphatically that he wants to keep off the screen, but it would not be surprising if some company proved insane enough to pay it, despite the fact that the Cohan name has not two-bits' worth of box-office value.

POLITICS AND PICTURE POLICY . . .

WHEN the overlords of the motion picture realm some years ago began to fear that public prying might poke holes in the bonds which united them in a tight trust, they erected a buffer to absorb the pokes and keep them from getting through to the main structure. In the name of self-regulation they organized the Motion Picture Producers' and Distributors' Association and offered it as a holy gesture to guard both the standard of pictures and the interests of those who paid to see them. One would think their first concern would have been to entrust the welfare of the association to a person familiar with film production and distribution, but instead they entrusted it to a man who knew nothing about pictures but a lot about politics and Presbyterianism— Will Hays. And Will, apparently deeming a knowledge of pictures unessential to the conduct of his organization, chose as his lieutenant, in the person of Carl Millikan, a politician who was governor of Maine and a churchman with high rating as a Protestant layman. To please the Catholics he added Joe Breen to his staff, but Joe unexpectedly turned out to be the noblest Roman of them all by developing a real sense of picture values and courage enough to enforce his demand for their recognition. In an effort to please the powerful National Association of Women's Clubs he displayed it by placing on his staff its

former president, Mrs. Ella Winters. He cast Charles Pettijohn in the role of political roustabout, a role he had spent long years in learning how to play.

Had to Have Protection ...

THE automobile industry has a central organization which is composed solely of people who know the automobile business, and the steel industry has a similar body composed of steel experts. So it is with all the country's main industries. Why, then, is the film industry the only one which has a governing body composed solely of people without prior experience in the making or selling of motion pictures? The answer is that the film industry is the only one, since the Sherman anti-trust law was passed, that knew it was vulnerable under the restrictions of that law and therefore depended for existence upon the protection it could build for itself. If the producers' organization had been composed solely of people with picture knowledge and whose single concern was the healthy, legitimate growth of the industry, there could have been reared a structure which today would not be in process of demolition by the Department of Justice. Even above the odor of his own ego and dictator complex, Franklin Roosevelt caught the smell of the film industry's trade practices and declared they "stink to heaven."

Respectability Under Pressure . . .

QUITE consistent with their policy of keeping a weather eye open for favorable influence breezes, the major producers united in making the Motion Picture Herald the industry's chief trade journal, ever mindful of the fact that its owner, Martin Quigley, stands high in Catholic layman ranks. Quigley is an able publisher and has made the Herald an excellent paper. But he has my sympathy. From his occasional writings I get the impression that he chafes under the obligations the advertising patronage of the producers places upon him, that he would like to speak right out and tell how rotten he thinks things are. Even though Terry Ramsaye, the Herald's editor, always seemingly is concerned much more with his literary style than with the thought he tries to express with it, now and then through a chink in the verbal foliage which obscures his meaning and makes reading him a sporting proposition in that his ideas escape the hunter more often than they are caught, there comes a suggestion of a rebellious spirit yearning to express itself freely and frankly. . . . But everything the film industry has done to give it the appearance of respectability has failed to hit the mark aimed at. Now it is in process of having respectability forced upon it.

WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW? . . .

III/HILE hustling along the Boulevard the other day W I encountered my old friend, Eugene Roth, whom I knew up north when Hollywood was an orchard. He now is managing director of the International Research Library, a Hollywood institution. I asked him what it was, and he took me to his office and

showed me. It is a most astonishing thing, one which should solve all the research problems of all the picture studios. I could not grasp the sweep of it until Gene reduced it to statistics; then I realized that it embraces the sum total of man's thought and accomplishments. It includes 144,751 articles and books in its library file dealing exhaustively with that many subjects. It can tell you about the state of the papyrus industry in 3850 B. C. and the music of Irving Berlin; about the squirrels and children in City Park, Mobile, Alabama, in 1860, and fireplaces and ovens from the cave man era until today; it will provide you with full information about women's garters and the cathedrals of the world. I did not ask Gene, but I am confident that if it cannot tell you who killed Cock Robin, it at least can tell you at whom the finger of suspicion pointed at the time the noted crime was committed. It contains no less than 4,527,686 pictures, prints, clippings, photos and research material items, and 490,000 pounds of library materials, the result of the genius of artists, writers, photographers, printers and publishers of all time. Hamilton Grayson and Winifred Rosser have spent a lifetime assembling the extraordinary mass of material which soon will be available to Hollywood picture makers.

WHEN LAZINESS CAME TO HOLLYWOOD . . .

WHEN the microphone came to Hollywood to disturb the secondary of the turb the serenity of the silent art which was being developed to the point of perfection, it brought with it a temptation to directors and writers to become lazy. It was so easy to write a love scene for the microphone—"Boy says to girl, 'I love you.' "so easy to direct it, there seemed to be no reason why mental effort should be resorted to in striving to design a scene for the camera to record. The laziness virus spread through the veins of producers, writers and directors until the spoken word became the screen's chief medium of expression, and the duty of the camera became one of photographing people talking to one another. Screen entertainment had made for itself such a firmly fixed place among the diversions of the public, it took seven or eight years for the picture-going habit to weaken under the barrage of dialogue; but it finally weakened, and in an effort to restore its strength the film industry is spending one million dollars to make the patient think he has no reason for being weak.

How Clarence Brown Did It . . .

WHILE the exploitation departments of the producing organizations are making motions which will prove futile, Hollywood could help things along by injecting some silent virus in the veins of the pictures it is making now. I concede that it takes more brains to write for the camera than to write for the microphone, but the talkie era has given screen writers such a long mental rest, they should by this time be equal to the task of writing pictures instead of dialogue. As a mark to shoot at, I recommend some scenes I can re-run today on my mental screen even though it must be all of ten years since I saw them

in the picture of which they were a part. The picture, Flesh and the Devil; the stars, Greta Garbo and Jack Gilbert; the director, Clarence Brown. Gilbert and Garbo are in love, and Marc McDermott, Garbo's husband, finds the lovers in a compromising position. A quarrel follows; an exchange of cards registers there will be a duel. Next we see the duelling ground, a hilltop against a sky highlighted by the rising sun. The camera stands a long way off, and when the combatants and their seconds arrive, we see them only as little figures, black against the vivid background. The seconds disappear down the up-stage slope of the hill; the combatants stand back-to-back; a third figure drops a handkerchief as a signal, then disappears; the combatants walk way from one another to get the right distance apart—and walk out of the scene, one on each side of the screen, leaving it without a person in sight. Next we see a puff of smoke on the right and on the left of the screen, then the seconds as they run up from the far side of the hill and come into view, little figures a long way off. We see them separate into two groups, one of which runs off-stage right, the other off-stage left; fade-out, leaving a bare screen. Who was the victor in the duel? Fade in on Garbo trying on a widow's hat in a stylish shop; on her lips is a faint smile of satisfaction. (I had intended writing the duel sequence as it would appear in a talkie of today, but at the mere thought of it I burst out crying and could not go

"THE OLD, OLD QUESTION" . . .

OUR thanks to Rob Wagner for the following, which appeared under the above heading in a recent issue of his always interesting and clever Script: "Another thing we came back to was a slump in cinema box-office returns accompanied by a terrific wonderment as to what is the matter with motion pictures, and a million-dollar campaign to buy 'em an oxygen tent. All of which seems queer when for years Welford Beaton has been answering that question in his Hollywood Spectator in the best English since Chaucer. We also learned that the slump in picture attendance, curiously enough, synchronized with Movieland's sudden passion for horses, that they've all gone in for raising horses, racing horses, or at least betting on horses. We'll look into this and see if there is any connection."

ANOTHER STAR ON THE WAY . . .

A YOUNG woman whose name will be famous in the not too distant future is Ellen Morgan, a seventeen-year-old miss, who, without any previous stage or screen experience, carried with extraordinary conviction the long and exacting role of Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House. The place, Las Palmas Theatre; the occasion, another week in the Drama Festival being presented at the little theatre by El Capitan College of the Theatre, the institution which Henry Duffy, Mrs. Duffy (Dale Winter), and associates are making such an important recruiting ground for screen and stage talent. The Nora role

is an arduous one; there is only one scene in the play in which Nora does not appear and in which she is not the important character. Emotionally the part runs the scale from frolicking with her children to leaving both husband and home. The way this young girl developes the possibilities of each of her scenes is astonishing and is a tribute to the proficiency of the faculty of the school in which she is being trained. Ellen has the physical beauty which is a screen asset and the feeling and intelligence of which screen and stage stars are made. Duffy pupils were cast in all the Doll's House parts, and provided an evening of most interesting entertainment. The one setting to which the action is confined was a fine example of stage designing by Max Ree, who made many artistic contributions to motion pictures and is now a member of the Duffy faculty.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS...

N ORDINARY sweet potato which Mrs. Spec-A tator placed in a vase and kept supplied with water, now has a graceful vine clinging to slender sticks four feet high. Europe's sweet potato, Herr Hitler, seems to be extending himself almost as rapidly. It will be interesting to see if his sticks will continue to carry the load. . . . I have become a croquet enthusiast; K. C. B. spent six months developing a croquet ground, then lured me into playing with him and now is depriving me of the privilege of spending my small change in a manner that would bring me something I could bring home and eat. . . . Up in Seattle a few months ago, I called on my boyhood friend, Dave Thomson, which, perhaps, is an undignified way to designate Dean David Thomson of the University of Washington; but, anyway, I called on Dave, told him the ingredients of my pipe tobacco mixture, and later he wrote me that I had too great a proportion of 79 Mixture to the amount of Heine's Mixture. I have been trying it his way, and like it better. . . . In the change you get when you pay your check at a Brown Derby restaurant you find the dollar bills are spotlessly new. Like everything else the restaurants serve, I suppose Bob Cobb buys his dollar bills fresh every day. . . . I think our ducks have developed affection for me; the five of them, Sophie, Manchester, Mrs. Bromleigh, Mr. Stuyvesant and George, just came in a solemn, tail-twitching procession around the corner of the house and have squatted near the chair in which I write. Mrs. Bromleigh, beautifully marked and tamest of the lot, is my favorite. I hope when she grows up her fine qualities will be inherited by an egg. . . . I like marketing, but at the cashier's desk do not like to get behind a woman shopper who waits until her purchases are totaled before she takes her handbag off her arm, opens it, fishes around for her purse, opens it, and then fishes for one coin at a time, quite oblivious to the fact that a number of shoppers are waiting for her to get out of the way. . . . One of the finest ceilings to be seen anywhere is that of the drawing room in Winnie Sheehan's home. He brought it from Europe and had the architect design the room to accommodate it.... One of my favorite bits of music is Good Night, Sweetheart.... Had two or three other observations to make here, but it occurs to me what an appropriate exit line that last one is; so, good night, sweethearts!

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

ANOTHER FRANK LLOYD TRIUMPH . . .

● IF I WERE KING; Paramount picture and release; stars Ronald Colman; produced and directed by Frank Lloyd; associate producer, Lou Smith; screen play by Preston Sturges; based on the play by Justin Huntly McCarthy; photographed by Theodor Sparkuhl; art direction by Hans Dreier and Jihn Goodman; edited by Hugh Bennett; sound recording, Harold C. Lewis and John Cope; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman; special photographic effects, Gordon Jennings; costumes, Edith Head; musical direction, Boris Morros; musical score by Richard Hageman. Supporting players: Basil Rathbone, Frances Dee, Ellen Drew, C. V. France, Henry Wilcoxon, Heather Thatcher, Stanley Ridges, Bruce Lester, Walter Kingsford, Alma Lloyd, Sidney Toler, Colin Tapley, Ralph Forbes, John Miljan, William Haade, Adrian Morris, Montagu Love, Lester Matthews, William Farnum, Paul Harvey, Barry Maccollum, May Beatty, Winter Hall, Francis McDonald, Ann Evers, Jean Fenwick. Running time, 100 minutes.

DEPENDABLE Frank Lloyd has come through with another to gladden the hearts of exhibitors. If I Were King is excellent entertainment primarily because it is one of the finest examples of talkie technique Hollywood has turned out. There is not too much dialogue, and what there is is spoken in tones to match the moods of scenes. Even tempo is maintained throughout, the visual telling of the story being smooth and consistent. Producer-Director Lloyd did not over-build the production until the story was engulfed in massive sets and masses of people, as Metro did with Marie Antoinette. In If I Were King the story has the right of way, and to that fact is due primarily the audience appeal which will make the picture a tremendous box-office success. It is a strong argument in favor of unit production, the only system which permits a screen creation to be the expression of one mind, as every art creation must be to be worthy of the art to which it belongs. Many people make outstanding contributions to this picture, but as a whole, it expresses the mind of Frank Lloyd. His direction throughout is that of a master.

Brilliant Screen Writing . . .

THE screen play of Preston Sturges is one of the most brilliant examples of screen writing ever handed a director. It is a far cry from the glitter of the court of a French Louis to the gloom of the slums of the French capital, and the characters which inhabit both represent the opposite poles of the social scale, but Sturges handles both with equal authority. Lloyd's direction emphasizes the contrast by the vividness of the characterizations which he developes. The story of Francois Villon is sure-fire box-office, but not unless its potentialities are realized in the script, direction and acting. Sturges's dialogue has box-office value on its own account, many of the

lines having marked literary beauty. It is rather an odd coincidence that in the mails on the way to its subscribers when I was viewing the picture, was the last Spectator in which I had this to say: "As long as pictures are composed so largely of dialogue, it might be a good idea now and then to treat the audience to a beautifully worded speech, one which, by developing the charm which words can have, if given to a character who logically could read it would have distinct entertainment value." In If I Were King there are a dozen such speeches as I had in mind, and that they have entertainment value will be demonstrated by the success the picture will achieve.

Ronald Colman's Great Performance . . .

IEVER before in his long and successful screen career did Ronald Colman present us with a more brilliant performance than that of his Francois Villon in this picture. He brings out the intellectual side of the strange character to a greater degree than it was developed by others who have played the part, realizing beautifully all the literary values of the poetic speeches Sturges provided. But no less impressive is Ronnie in his swashbuckling interludes and romantic moments. The story is his from the first, revolves around him and fastens our attention on him, and never for a moment does he let us down. Always a strong box-office favorite, this picture will strengthen the demand for him, make him more than ever a favorite. Opposite him in If I Were King is the lovely and charming Frances Dee whom we do not see as often as we would wish. Mrs. Joel Mc-Crea should not be so stingy with the graciousness of Frances Dee whose presence in If I_Were_King gives its romance dignity and charm. Ellen Drew, with very little previous experience before the camera, comes through with a dramatic performance which an experienced actress might envy. Alma Lloyd also does her bit towards making the picture worthwhile.

Many Deserving of Credit . . .

F THE men in supporting roles, Basil Rathbone, by virtue of the prominence of his part and his complete mastery of it, gives a performance which probably will bring him an Academy award when the year's accomplishments are surveyed. His King Louis is an extraordinary study. C. V. France lends spiritual quality and persuasiveness to his characterization as a priest; and the robust and always competent Henry Wilcoxon is another who scores. I would like to see Wilcoxon in a big part that would permit him to show what an excellent actor he is. Walter Kingsford, one of our most dependable players, lends conviction to his role. Others who make their presence felt are Heather Thatcher, Sidney Toler, Stanley Ridges, Ralph Forbes. The sets designed by Hans Dreier and John Goodman have distinct storytelling value. Dreier, for a long time head of the Paramount art department, always builds for the story and not only to please the eye. The slum sets in If I Were King, as built and photographed, have such an air of authenticity that one almost can smell

them; and the royal quarters convey the same conviction of fidelity to their period, credit for which is to be shared by the photography of Theodor Sparkuhl. Edith Head faced a great task in dressing the players in costumes of the period and contributed greatly to the visual wealth of the production.

JOHN BRAHM SCORES AGAIN . . .

• GIRLS' SCHOOL; Columbia picture and release; director, John Brahm; producer, Sam Marx; screen play by Tess Slesinger and Richard Sherman; based on Miss Slesinger's original story; photography, Fraz Planer; film editor, Otto Meyer; musical director, Morris Stoloff. Cast: Anne Shirley, Nan Grey, Ralph Bellamy, Dorothy Moore, Gloria Holden, Marjorie Main, Margaret Tallichet, Peggy Moran, Kenneth Howell, Noah Beery, Jr., Cecil Cunningham, Pierre Watkin, Doris Kenyon. Running time, 71 minutes.

MY REVIEW of the second picture John Brahm directed in this country, started off with, "At last a text book on talkie direction." (Spectator, February 12, 1938.) The story of that picture, Penitentiary, was told almost for its full length, in the drab atmosphere of a prison and dealt with prisoners and prison officials. Now John Brahm swings to the opposite end of the social scale and with equal authority depicts life in a fashionable boarding school for girls. To picture people with an eye for direction, Girls' School will prove a sheer delight; to picture patrons everywhere it will prove most engaging entertainment. The screen play, ably written with regard for the kind of direction it was to get, does not follow the screen's standard story formula of two central characters and a theme which concerns only them; rather it is a composite presentation of school life into the pattern of which are woven various slightly related incidents which bring half a dozen characters to the front at intervals. It is Brahm's second text book on talkie direction, and if all pictures were directed as brilliantly, there would be no necessity for the film industry's investment of one million dollars in a hoopla effort to fatten boxoffices.

Anne Shirley's Fine Performance . . .

TWO things stand out in Brahm's direction—the good taste he displays throughout and the outstanding performances he developes from a cast composed principally of young people. A feature of the performances is the easy, conversational tone in which dialogue is delivered, a feature all other directors would profit from studying. The whole picture is a succession of brilliant directorial touches, of grouping for visual values and flashes of humor which sprinkle the showing with laughs. Anne Shirley gives a remarkable performance. Her character is a negative one of the only girl among the many who has to work her way through the school's fouryear course; a rather drab characterization in monotone, a sharp contrast with the colorful ebullience of the scores of lively youngsters who come from richer homes and are at "That ebullient age when life is letting off its over-charge of laughter," as someone has written. There is no laughter in Anne's life, but

in her characterization is an underlying suggestion of power and purpose which gives her complete command of all her scenes. Instead of suspending her for her refusal to play a part in an unimportant Western picture, RKO should give Anne a bonus for preventing it from committing such a folly.

Nan Grey and Noah, Jr. . . .

OTHER pictures in which Nan Grey has appeared or other directors who have guided her, never revealed her as the accomplished actress she becomes in the hands of Brahm. I cannot recall anything else she has done, but it will take me a long time to forget the forcefulness of her Girls' School performance. Dorothy Moore is another girl who registers strongly. Noah Beery, Jr., whose first appearance on the screen the Spectator hailed as the beginning of a brilliant career, demonstrates in this picture that there is reason for the prediction, and suggests the lack of wisdom on the part of the producers in taking so long to discover him. Noah plays with Anne Shirley a love scene as tender and sweet as any to the credit of our most experienced Romeos. A fine looking boy, son of an able actor whose talent he has inherited, his assurance of eventual stardom is readily apparent to anyone except a talent scout and the scout's employers. A score or more of the school girls have bits or speeches and each performs her task with as much assurance as that shown by the leading players.

All Hands Deserve Credit ...

OF THE adults, none dwarfs the others, each fitting into his or her place with too much neatness to suggest acting. Cecil Cunningham is ideal casting as head of the school. Among the faculty members are two of my favorite character women, Gloria Holden and Marjorie Main. The former has the more outstanding part, and in one scene her quick transition from joy to sorrow is done so beautifully the preview audience applauded her warmly. Doris Kenyon, beautiful and charming as ever, is on the screen just long enough to make us regret it is not longer. Margaret Tallichet contributes one clever bit of comedy. Pierre Watkin gives a heart-warming performance as Nan Grey's father, and Ralph Bellamy, always an agreeable addition to a picture cast, bounces gaily into this one and bounces out again quite promptly with Gloria Holden, altar-bound, at his side-one of the entertaining but isolated elements of the story. Tess Slesinger wrote the original play. Sam Marx produced for Columbia. The picture is mounted in a manner which establishes perfect unity between the

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mood of the story and its physical attributes. For this, credit is due Stephen Goosson and Lionel Banks. For developing all the visual possibilities of the production credit is due Franz Planer for fine photography. After the preview I bumped into Morris Stoloff, musical director, who assured me there was a half-hour of background music in Girls' School. I had not noticed it, which is the greatest tribute I can pay it and its composer, Gregory Stone. When we are conscious of background music there is something the matter with the foreground or the music.

MAKES PLEASANT ENTERTAINMENT . . .

 YOUTH TAKES A FLING; Universal; producer, Joe Pasternak; director, Archie Mayo; assistant director, Frank Shaw; screen play, Myles Connolly photographer, Rudolph Mate; art director, Jack Otterson; film editor, Philip Cahn; musical director, Charles Previn; song, Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson. Cast: Andrea Leeds, Joel McCrea, Frank Jenks, Dorothea Kent, Isabel Jeans, Virginia Grey, Grant Mitchell, Henry Mollison, Brandon Tynan, Oscar O'Shea, Granville Bates, Roger Davis, Marion Martin, Olaf Hytten, Willie Best. Running times, 78 minutes.

MANY times the Spectator has contended that the old one about the play's being the thing does not apply to motion pictures. All any audience looks for is entertainment. Youth Takes a Fling is entertaining, but as a screen play it lacks most of the standard ingredients. For instance, it has no villain, the conflict element being the hero's stubbornness in acknowledging to himself that he is in love. From the outset we are left in no doubt about the state of the girl's feelings towards the hero. Andrea Leeds is in love with a dream man when the story opens; she sees the dream realized in the person of Joel Mc-Crea, and the moment her eyes glimpse him, she transfers her love from the dream to the actuality, and thereafter the picture is wholly a depiction of the various devices she resorts to to lure him to the altar. That is all there is to the story, but it makes a nice little story, neatly composed by Myles Connolly, smartly directed by Archie Mayo, adequately presented by that master producer, Joe Pasternak, and, as is usual with Universal pictures, showing some artistically attractive sets designed by Jack Otterson and his associate. Richard Riedel.

Joel McCrea's Best Performance . . .

WITH such a frail story to start with, the picture had to rely chiefly on direction and performances for its entertainment qualities. Both are excellent. Under Archie Mayo's guidance, Joel McCrea gives what appeals to me as the ablest performance of his career as a screen actor. It is a purely mental characterization, one in which physical prowess does not figure. The manner in which he declares his love will give you an idea of both his characterization and his strenuous efforts to ward off the darts of cupid. "Gosh darn it!" he exclaims rebelliously to Andrea, "I'm stuck on you!" The very idea makes him furious. Andrea Leeds is coming along rapidly, her performance in this picture being another step forward. Frank Jenks proves himself an exceedingly

clever comedian. Dorothea Kent and Isabel Jeans handle their roles acceptably, and among the men, Oscar O'Shea, Granville Bates and Henry Mollison contribute considerably to the satisfaction the picture will give. Rudolph Maté is to be credited with some strikingly artistic photography.

ONE OF THE WORST . . .

 SHARPSHOOTERS; 20th-Fox picture and release; director, James Tinling; executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; screen play by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; based on an original story by Maurice Rapf and Lester Ziffren; photography, Barney McGill; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Haldane Douglas; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Herschel; sound, Joseph E. Aiken and William H. Anderson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Brian Donley, Lynn Bari, Wally Vernon, John King, Douglas Dumbrille, C. Henry Gordon, Sidney Blackmer, Martin Joseph Spellman, Jr., Frank Puglia, Hamilton MacFadden, Romaine Callendar. Running time, 63 minutes.

NEWSREEL cameramen are coming into their own. They have had two screen appearances already, first in Metro's big and poor Too Hot to Handle, and now in Century's small and poor Sharpshooters. If we are to believe these pictures, ace cameramen must be charming fellows; at least, I presume we are supposed to be charmed with them, for in each picture one of them is the hero, and heroes must charm us to make us applaud their valiant efforts to overcome all the obstacles scripts put in their paths. Metro's ace cameraman is a boastful faker, and Century's a drunken roisterer, a loud-mouthed braggart of whom we get very weary as the film unwinds. One of his prettiest sequences is shot in a night club, where, maudlin with drink, he screams lines which consist of boisterous boasts of his own astuteness in outwitting his competitors. The locale is a mythical kingdom of Europe, and our ace cameraman shows the benighted Europeans just how a regular American fellow acts when he is away from home.

Will Disgrace Its Partners . . .

OUR admiration and respect for newsreel cameramen have been earned by the scenes they have sent us from abroad. The two pictures revealing their conduct and methods, if we are asses enough to take them at their face values, would make us despise them. But no doubt the producers will tell us it is all just good, clean fun; will argue that the disgusting drunk sequence is rare comedy to make us laugh. Some of those in the preview audience did laugh, but to offer such trash is an insult to people with good taste and sufficient national pride to resent the broadcasting of such a characterization as a typical example of an American cameraman at work in a foreign field. The same thing goes for the Metro picture, which, however, is less vulgar than Sharpshooters. No fault can be found with Brian Donlevy's skill in giving the director the kind of performance demanded of him. It was his misfortune, as well as that of the other members of the cast, to have been given places in such a vehicle.. The best that Sharpshooters can do will be to disgrace whatPage Twelve October 1, 1938

ever partners it gets on double bills. And it leaves the newsreel cameraman picture yet to be made.

MUCH UNNESSARY NOISE . . .

 STRAIGHT, PLACE AND SHOW; 20th-Fox production and release; stars the Ritz Brothers; director, David Butler; associate producer, David Hempstead; screen play by M. M. Musselman and Allen Rivkin; based on a play by Damon Runyon and Irving Caesar; additional dialogue, Lew Brown; lyrics and music of "With You on My Mind" and "Why Not String Along with Me?" by Lew Brown and Lew Pollack; special material by Sid Kuller, Ray Golden and Jule Styne; dances staged by Nicholas Castle and Geneva Sawyer; photography, Ernest Palmer; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Lewis Creber; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Irene Morra; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical direction, Louis Silver. Supporting players: Richard Arlen, Ethel Merman, Phyllis Brooks, George Barbier, Sidney Blackmer, Will Stanton, Ivan Lebedeff, Gregory Gaye, Rafael Storm, Stanley Fields, Tiny Roebuck, Ben Welden, Ed Gargan, Pat McKee. Running time, 66 minutes.

MOTION pictures are your noisiest entertainment. The comedy of the Ritz Brothers is purely pantomimic; we laugh at what we see them do, not at what we hear them say. They perhaps are funnier in this picture than they have been in any others, but I cannot advise you to see it, as to get the Ritz comedy you have to take a tremendous amount of quite unnecessary noise. Even at a hunt club dance, Phyllis Brooks and Dick Arlen, whose feet are on the top rung of the social ladder, discuss their romance in tones which must carry to every other couple on the dance floor. If we are to believe what we see—as we must if we are to get satisfactory returns on what we pay to get in-Phyllis and Dick are members of highbrow families, have been reared in the best homes and educated in the best schools; but when we hear them airing their romantic misunderstandings loudly enough to be heard by a ballroom full of people, we must put them down as a couple of vulgar lowbrows. And that is a medium which can carry a whisper to the people in the most distant seats!

It Is Too Hard to Take . . .

MOTION picture stupidity is responsible for a a box-office slump which producers are endeavoring to remedy with money while the stupidity which caused it still persists. Straight, Place and Show could have been a comedy extremely funny and easy to take, but, as with Youth Takes a Fling, its noise makes it too hard to take. It asks us to accept the youthful and wholly feminine Phyllis Brooks as a horse trainer. Next we can expect to have Darryl Zanuck asking us to accept Shirley Temple as a college football halfback. The one redeeming feature of Straight, Place and Show is the closing steeplechase sequence which is both thrilling and funny, as well as a tribute to the skill of those in charge of its mechanics; but, even so, it does not compensate for all we have to sit through in the way of unnecessary clamor which precedes it. When producers offer us entertainment which resembles motion pictures, I will review their offerings as such; when they offer us clamor, I will review it as such. As a noise, Straight, Place and Show is a howling success, that is, if you like howls. At a Labor Relations Board hearing Darryl admitted that he is recognized as a most capable cutter. The credits inform us that he was in charge of production of the Ritz Brothers picture. He should have demonstrated his niftiness as a cutter by cutting out a lot of the noise.

EXTREMELY HARD TO TAKE . . .

• THERE GOES MY HEART; Hal Roach production for United Artists release; co-stars Fredric March and Virginia Bruce; director, Norman Z. McLeod; producer, Milton H. Bren; screen play by Eddie Moran and Jack Jevne; based on an or iginal idea by Ed Sullivan; photography, Norbert Brodine; photographic effects, Roy Seawright; art direction, Charles D. Hall; musical direction, Marvin Hatley; set decorations, W. L. Stevens; Miss Bruce's gowns by Irene; sound, William Randall and W. B. Delaplain; film editor, William Terhune. Supporting players: Patsy Kelly, Alan Mowbray, Nancy Carroll, Eugene Pallette, Claude Gillingwater, Arthur Lake, Etienne Girardot, Robert Armstrong, Irving Bacon, Irving Pichel, Sid Saylor, J. Farrell MacDonald. Running time,

WHEN you sit down to dine and find every dish is flavored with something you do not like, there is no use telling you each dish itself is well cooked and tasty and that you should disregard the flavor. It is much the same way with There Goes My Heart. It has some good points, but it is flavored with too much noise. The lower register of Patsy Kelly's voice is soothing and musical; her upper register is a squeal. Patsy has more sides than any other member of the cast, and she squeals most of them. In her first sequence her squeals have all the soothing delicacy of a saw when it encounters a nail in a split board. That puts your nerves nicely on edge for Gene Pallette's further treatment. Gene's lower register is a wooly growl not hard to take; his upper register has the musical protest of an indignant saw when it encounters two nails an octave apart, and throughout the picture his upper register carries on. There are other assorted screams, roars and squeals which do their respective bits to make the picture more a test of your nervous resistance than a piece of pleasant entertainment.

Better Look for Another . . .

WHEN pictures were silent you patronized them because of their soothing influence upon nerves frayed by the noises incidental to a day's activities. Therein lay their strength as entertainment, their box-office lure. Wisely used sound added to their appeal because, for the first time in the history of theatrical entertainment, a whisper could be carried to the man in the last row in the top gallery. But picture producers never realized the fact. They have used the sound device largely to make the screen loud, vulgar, blatant, until it has driven audiences from picture houses; and now, instead of making the kind of pictures that will bring the audiences back, the film industry is spending a million dollars in a crazy attempt to make the public think it likes the kind of entertainment it knows it does not like. It simply does not make sense. There Goes My Heart

is just another example of its folly, just another nail in the box-office coffin. In addition to the devastating clamour of the dialogue delivery, it chatters incessantly through scenes devoid of story connection. The picture, as I have said, has some good points. A chocolate cake has good points, but you would not enjoy eating it if it were doused with garlic. It would be a waste of time, therefore, to point out the good points. The good points of There Goes My Heart are smothered with the garlic of unnecessary noise. Farther along the street, perhaps, you can find a picture easier to take.

STORY OF THE REDWOODS . . .

● VALLEY OF THE GIANTS; Warner Brothers, producers; director, William Keighley; story, Peter B. Kyne; screen play, Seton I. Miller and Michael Fessier; photographer, Sol Polito; technicolor photography, Allen B. Davey; color director, Natalie Kalmus; film editor, Jack Killifer; art director, Ted Smith; sound, Oliver S. Garretson; musical director, Leo Forbstein. Cast: Wayne Morris, Claire Trevor, Frank McHugh, Alan Hale, Donald Crisp, Charles Bickford, Jack LaRue, John Litel, Dick Purcell, El Brendel, Russell Simpson, Cy Kendall, Harry Cording, Wade Boteler, Helen MacKellar, Addison Richards. Running time, 80 minutes.

Reviewed by Robert Prescott

THERE are many slight touches and suggestions in Valley of the Giants that are quietly prophetic of things to come in the motion picture industry. First, I noticed a new and vitalized undercurrent throughout the stock plot exploiteers and land pirates robbing the people of their land. Peter B. Kyne, who wrote the original story, has never given much of his time to the social implications of economic oppression, using the theme merely for its age-old dramatic value. However, as rewritten and produced, Director William Keighley has completed a peculiarly satisfying document in which is recorded the struggle, universal in scope, of the people against exploitation. This theme treats of the early days in Northern California when timber cruising pirates were denuding the magnificent stands of redwood.

Writer Is Nostalgic . . .

TAVING been raised in a timber country, I was $oldsymbol{\Pi}$ especially impressed by a really magnificent portrayal of a roving, swashbuckling, tall-talking, lumberjack, played by Alan Hale. Hale is portrayed in a stock role, the defender of right and justice. The role itself is sentimental, and played by anyone but Hale might have suffered by too much mawkish low comedy. However, Hale seems to have caught the personality and feeling of a breed that still exists in the mountains—half wobblie, childish, violent, sentimental to the toenails and lumberjackish in the Olympian style. He enters early in the drama as the chief buck of land pirate Charles Bickford, who. having mowed down middlewestern timber, decides upon California as the next place. Bickford is a bit hairy chested in his role of he-man, and, after all, early western lumbermen were a pretty smooth lot; yet his performance is excellent. Hale parts with him when he finds that honest Wayne Morris and petty landholders in the Valley of the Giants are to be deprived of their land in a typical early west land piracy. Hale moves over to the side of justice triumphant, yet he does it with such a roisterous gusto that I found myself completely oblivious of Mr. Peter B. Kyne and his stock manipulations.

Claire Trevor Progresses . . .

THE girl of the gambling halls, another stock role, was gotten away with by Claire Trevor. This young woman has an unusual, non-Hollywood quality of reality that nearly always rises above the mediocrity of the roles assigned to her. She realized and caught and augmented the subtle possibilities in the production and emerged in a performance which showed her instinctive sociological comprehension. She, more than any of the other players, built and exhibited a struggle that is going on in Spain, Czechoslovakia, China and throughout the world where people are fighting for their liberties and their land. Claire Trevor entered the show as a hand-maiden of exploitation, a gambling camp-follower of timber pirates. Her metamorphosis from a stock chippie into a grimly determined believer in the oppressed, evades the pitfalls of moralizing, sentimentality and soup in which a lesser actress would have sunk. Even her eventual love for Wayne Morris is subordinated to the logical necessity of her intellectual right about face—her change from futility to utility. Produced in technicolor, this show has form. It presages an articulation that previous western themes have lacked. It deals with something that directly concerns the American people. Discretely, without vulgar propaganda, it carries the torch for conservation. And it should even satisfy the producers in the boxoffice.

CUMMINGS SAVES THE DAY . . .

● TOUCHDOWN, ARMY: Paramount picture and release; director, Kurt Neumann; associate producer, Edward T. Lowe; original story and screen play by Lloyd Corrigan and Erwin Gelsey; photography, Victor Milner; art direction, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; edited by Arthur Schmidt; sound recording, George Dutton and Richard Olson; interior decroations, A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: John Howard, Mary Carlisle, Robert Cummings, William Frawley, Owen Davis, Jr., Benny Baker, Minor Watson, Raymond Hatton. Running time, 60 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DURING the first few scenes it occurred to me that I could start off my review with a quip, stating that the motion picture industry was underpaying the American public, in as much as \$250,000, divided among so many, was far too little compensation for sitting through pictures like this. And I could have used my quip with thorough justice if Robert Cummings had not popped onto the screen with one of the best comedy performances I have seen this year. Playing scenes which are incomparably better than anything else in the picture, Cummings hits his stride as a screen actor, reveals a wide understanding of human nature and a grasp of how to submerge himself in a character, and generally plays with a sureness, breeziness and subtlety which

would have made his performance a hit in a better production. The picture, however, is just a stereotyped rendition of the old yarn about the conceited and defiant young man who goes to West Point for ulterior reasons, in this case a major's daughter, but turns out to be a right good sort under the discipline and ideals he finds there. Not that this situation could not yet be made into an entertaining film, if it serves as the thread upon which to hang some interesting commentary on the institution. But Touchdown, Army is all thread.

Stock Shots Are Many . . .

THE picture is hastily and carelessly produced. What percentage of it is composed of stock shots of the students and their football team I would not venture to guess, but it is large. Photographically these shots range all the way from murky grey to near black. This is not intended as a reflection on Cameraman Victor Milner, who probably had little or nothing to do with the choice of the stock views, and whose scenes are well lighted. The best stretches of screen play writing, done by Lloyd Corrigan and Erwin Gelsey, are fortunately the scenes in which Cummings appears. Or maybe he makes them seem better than they are. Silly dialogue writing is the almost incomprehensibly erudite language employed by the upper classman when they are hazing the plebes. A prize improbability is when one of the characters, with false whiskers and a wig, disguises himself as an old colonel, takes the center of the floor at a party, fooling everybody. The only originality occurs in the scoring of the telling touchdown in the football game, which is accomplished in a spectacular way.

Direction Is Workmanlike . . .

OF THE other leading players, John Howard is sorrowly miscast as a student, being too mature as a type, especially in a sequence when he is supposed to be a plebe. Mary Carlisle plays with capability the rather transparent role of the major's daughter. Owen Davis, Jr., knows how to speak lines, but he should not pitch his voice so high. Raymond Hatton stands out for his trouping as the make-believe colonel, even though the idea was absurd, and William Frawley, Benny Baker and Minor Watson give good accounts of themselves. Director Kurt Neuman handles his people in a workmanlike way—but it just wasn't in the cards. Anyway, the public will get a good performance for their money—or the motion picture industry's money.

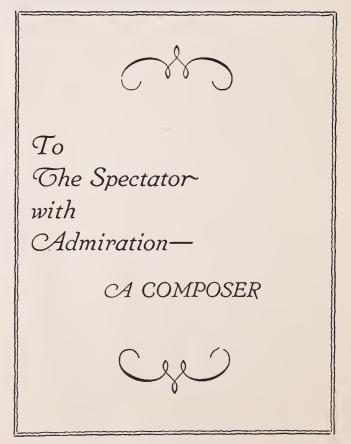
HE ORDERS BUTTERMILK ...

● STARLIGHT OVER TEXAS: Edward Finney picture for Monogram release; stars Tex Ritter; director, Al Herman; screen play by John Rathmell; based on an original idea by Harry MacPherson; photography, Francis Corby; sound recording, Glen Glenn; film editor, Fred Bain; songs, "Starlight Over Texas," by Harry Tobias and Roy Ingraham; "Ai! Viva Tequila!," Al Von Tilzer and Harry MacPherson; "A Garden in Granada," by Sam Lewis, Abel Baer and Ion Vasilescu; "Pickins," by A. J. Brier; "Twilight on the Trail," by Merle

Scobee; musical director, Frank Sanucci. Supporting players: Salvatore Damino, Carmen LaRoux, Rosa Turick, Horace Murphy, Snub Pollard, Karl Hackett, Charles King, Jr., Martin Garralaga, George Chesebro, Carlos Villarias, Edward Cassidy and the Northwesterns, including Merle Scobee, Ray Scobee, Shorty Brier, Buck Rasch and Chuck Davis, Running time, 58 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

WESTERN of above-the-average calibre. Tex A Ritter makes his initial appearance as a Monogram star, and a production of considerable color and excitement has been built around him. He brings a pronounced Texas drawl to the screen, an expressive, sometimes fervid, singing style, and an ease and affability which should gain him many friends among the fans of pictures of this sort. Starlight Over Texas is generously studded with musical numbers. A fiesta scene, laid on a ranch in old Mexico, is staged with uncommon elaborateness for a Western picture, and a number of Mexican dancers perform with dash and grace. A creditable screen play has been turned out by John Rathmell, based on an original of Harry Mac-Pherson. There are only a few basic plots on which Western stories can be built, and the merit of such a script lies in the fictional embellishments and the byplay of the characters. These touches the present story has. The hero even indulges in some philosophical passages on the seemingly animate nature of guns, a speech handled rather well by Ritter, by the by. An amusing incident is when the hero saunters up to the bar and orders buttermilk, a noncon-



formity which leads to a challenge and a fight at the hands of one of the toughies present.

Fight Scenes Realistic . . .

IRECTOR At Herman has done well by the D script, manifesting a particular aptitude for staging fight scenes. In the fracas following the buttermilk ordering, the hero really suffers, gets his head beat painfully against the bar, before he vanquishes his opponent. The cast, among which are numerous Mexican people, including the heroine, is generally satisfactory. The sets have atmosphere, the photography is of good quality, and the editing is better than it usually is in the Monogram endeavors. One scene comes to mind, however, which could be improved with respect to editing—the shot following the close of the fiesta sequence, when a man is shown seated in a chair outside the sheriff's office. At first we think he is a guest at the fiesta. A longer shot, showing the sign on the sheriff's office, or a fade-in on the sign, would eliminate this confusion. Frank Sanucci has given the musical numbers a first-rate musical background, making good use of small combinations, and the Northwesterners, cowboy musical aggregation, contribute some lilting interludes. The film as a whole will hold its own with Westerns coming out of any of the major studios.

ACTION WITHOUT SUSPENSE . . .

● THE NIGHT HAWK; Republic production and release; directed by Sidney Salkow; associate producer, Herman Schlom; original scren play by Earl Felton; production manager, Al Wilson; photographed by Jack Marta; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; film editor, Ernest Nims; art director, John Victor Mackay; musical director, Cy Feuer; song, "Never a Dream Goes By." by Walter Kent, Many Kurtz and Al Sherman; costumes by Irene Saltern. Cast: Robert Livingston, June Travis, Robert Armstrong, Ben Welden, Lucien Littlefield, Joseph Downing, Roland L. Got, Cy Kendall, Paul Fix, Billy Burrud, Charles Wilson, Dwight Frye, Paul McVey, Robert Homans. (Running time, 63 minutes.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

WHETHER he knows it or not, Director Sidney
Salkow is a freshman in the Salkow is a freshman in the Alfred Hitchcock School. This in itself is a compliment, for "Hitch" is the outstanding director in the field of action mystery stories. Those who remember The Thirty-nine Steps will easily understand what I mean. Night Hawk, Director Salkow's first screen effort behind the camera, is a good freshman thesis. He knows the tricks and devices that lift an action story beyond the realm of simple mobility. With a touch here and there he has attempted to create symbolism, unexpected twists, both favorite Hitchcock standbys. His dissolve from the three moneys, no hear, no see, no speak, to a cafe by the same name, is pure Hitchcock. His fast moving action against a background of listless fog and tranquil waves is another. But in one measure the picture merits a C grade-and that is suspense. Nothing in the plot is left to the onlooker's imagination. From the very start we are acquainted with the villain of all the ensuing dire deeds. This Hitch would never have done.

More Cutting . . .

CUPERVISING EDITOR Murray Seldeen and DEditor Ernest Nims might have been more lavish with the cutting shears. There were a number of laggy moments and some bare spots. The scene between the nurse and the iron-lung encased kid, for example, needed editing badly. The story, recounting the attempt of a ship news reporter to run to earth the brains of a smuggling outfit, played against a background of fast shooting and high action, has a number of plot novelties to make it absorbing. Screen Writer Earl Felton has fashioned a good melodrama, spiced with plenty of zip. I think a little of the dialogue might have been sacrificed for the sake of increased plot action, however. Associate Producer Herman Schlom has somebody in Robert Livingston, a young man whom I see for the first time. Together with screen veteran Robert Armstrong he carries the picture capably on his shoulders. The newcomer, to me at least, knows what to do before the camera. Ben Welden as the comic heavy deserves a round of applause. I draw the line on the characterization given to Roland Got as Willie, the hero's Chinese factotum. My next week's salary against a Republic commissary chocolate ice streamliner, American born Chinese boys do not speak the way Roland does in the current picture, with lots of flowers and twisted idioms in the spirit of Charlie Chan. All in all, Night Hawk is a nice little picture that need cause no exhibitor to hide when his customers leave the theatre.

Best Wishes
to the
Spectator

GEORGE
MARSHALL

I believe the Spectator's consistently constructive and honest policy deserves support—

EDWARD ARNOLD

Frank McDonald

Director

"FRESHMAN YEAR"

Universal

"FLIRTING WITH FATE"

the Joe E. Brown starrer

for David L. Loew

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Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—December 10, 1938

Vol. 13-No. 23

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Motion Pictures Could Beyour Best Entertainment



WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES AROUND . . .

 \mathbf{n}^{NE} thing I do not like about the Christmas season is the fact that I must take advantage of it as an excuse for asking its readers to make me presents in the form of advertising in a Christmas Number. I could imagine no happier existence than putting one's thoughts on editing a paper like the Spectator and having nothing to remind one that money is essential to its continued publication. The thought of money in no way influences the Spectator's editorial policy, but money itself has a powerful influence on the printer who makes the paper a physical reality. He insists upon being paid for his work, but otherwise is a very nice fellow and is quite cheerful when I stick him for lunch when I go down town to stand him off. This year's Christmas Number is now in preparation and I bespeak for it the generous patronage of those who think well of the Spectator. I feel it is the most valuable advertising medium for those who wish to direct attention to their screen activities. It is the only Hollywood film publication which mails over ninety per cent of its local circulation to the homes of subscribers, where it is read carefully and is not glanced at hastily, as is the lot of the publications which circulate in studio offices.

MEETS UNIVERSAL APPROVAL . . .

QUITE extraordinary was the reaction of Spectator readers to our plea in the last issue to the Jews who control films, to use the great medium of the screen on behalf of the sorely oppressed Jews in Germany. "As a Jew, I thank you," is the terse message one of the leading producers sent me. Another phoned me that he was giving the matter serious consideration and that he would consult other producers regarding it. "The most practical, though the most intangible, suggestion yet made," is a line from an approving note from a nationally known writer. "I have been opposed to propaganda films," writes another, "but one of the sort you suggest is something Hollywood owes civilization." My sug-

gestion was that the industry as a whole should make a picture touching briefly on the Hitler outrages, then showing Germany as a nation completely isolated from all others, cut off from all social or economic contact with other nations of the world. Like all the other countries, with the possible exception of the United States, Germany cannot live on what it can produce itself, consequently it soon could be starved into submission to any terms a coalition of other nations insisted upon. At present we have the spectacle of the leading nations seeking new homes for German Jews, thereby aiding Hitler in attaining the objective he aimed at from the beginning of his persecutions. German Jews should be permitted to live in Germany and Hitler should be made to like it. That was the idea I had in mind when I suggested the form an all-industry picture should take.

Power of Public Opinion . . .

ONE prominent director, while approving the Spectator article, expresses doubt of its efficiency. "I can't quite see," he writes, "how the crystalization of public sentiment in the United States—and every other country, of course—can affect Hitler in Germany. The picture you suggest would not be shown there." My director friend overlooks the economic effect of national isolation, but I believe even a stronger force as a destroyer of national morale would be the united condemnation of the rest of the world. Public sentiment has no regard for boundary lines nor do custom regulations control its movement. Hitler already is feeling the pinch of it, but all his efforts to keep it, by censorship of papers and radio, from reaching the German population as a whole, cannot keep out of Germany the feeling that the rest of the world is condemning it. The reasons, therefore, for the economic isolation the picture would urge, could not be hidden from the population when it began to feel the lack of things it needs. Once they realize that Hitler's treatment of Jews was responsible for the suffering of Gentiles, they surely would get rid of him. If they continued to endure him, it is only fair that they should endure the suffering that goes with him. I am fed up on reading that, "the German people as a whole do not approve of the persecution of Jews." The majority in any country is solely responsible for anything which con-

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tinues to happen in it. That is what the picture I suggest should emphasize as an argument in favor of economic isolation.

Film Industry Is On Trial . . .

WHEN we mentally survey the pictures which have been made we find that most of all the been made we find that most of the historical crises, national crimes and major catastrophes have been used as screen material. DeMille went a long way back and gave us the late Theodore Roberts, in the role of Moses, leading the Jews out of Egypt in The Ten Commandments. Since then the film industry has ventured up through the ages to deal with controversial topics as modern as the World War, the Klu Klux Klan, lynchings, rackets, and other manifestations of the viciousness of the present social order. Now, faced with the greatest crime of history, the film industry, controlled by Jews, is in a position to come to the aid of members of their race who are the victims of the crime, and at the same time to express in a picture the feelings of Gentiles whom the crime has shocked and whose indignation it has aroused. The action of President Roosevelt in virtually severing diplomatic relations with Germany, should encourage the screen to raise its powerful voice on behalf of respectable humanity. The situation is one which puts the industry on trial. Unless the Jews who control it uses it to make a plea for justice for the Jews of Germany, they are going to lose the respect of all right thinking people.

FOR A WORTHY CAUSE . . .

PPORTUNITY to help a worthy cause will be Opresented to Hollywood people on Sunday evening, December 11, by the Motion Picture Artists' Committee: Harpo Marx, George Burns, Gracie Allen, and a score of other film luminaries will express their sympathy with the embattled Chinese people by appearing as entertainers at a monster rally. Sponsors of the affair include Luise Rainer, Anna May Wong, Lewis Milestone, Gale Sondergaard, Sylvia Sidney, Johnny Green, Frances Farmer, Dudley Nichols, Dashiell Hammett and Dorothy Parker. T. K. Chang, Los Angelus consul for the Chinese Republic, is cooperating with the sponsors. Besides entertainment by individual stars, the program will include ensemble dancing and a "living newspaper" stage production dramatizing China's fight for democratic government and national independence. Proceeds of the affair will go to China civilian relief.

ENGLISH PICTURE DRAWS WELL . . .

THE success of The Citadel in this country shows once more that the public will go for a good piconce more that the public will go for a good picture even though it lacks outstanding box-office names. Charles Boyer has given the screen some superlative performances, but it has not been demonstrated that he is a box-office asset on his own account. Rosalind Russell is coming up rapidly, but marquees have not yet exploited her name extensively. However, this Metro picture made in England and, with the exception of Rosalind, having an all-

British cast, has been performing quite nicely at American box-offices. Weekly Variety reports reveal that at a Pittsburg house, Citadel garnered \$22,-000 in one week, while at the same house a week earlier Paramount's ambitious Men With Wings had a take of \$10,700. At the Capitol, New York, the English picture did \$45,000 on its first week, \$32,-000 the second. In a Cleveland house Citadel drew \$15,500 in a house in which The Great Waltz the previous week drew \$14,000. If you have not seen The Citadel, you will find it at the Four Star Theatre.

PUBLIC IS WILLING TO THINK . . .

UNQUESTIONABLY one of the factors chiefly responsible for the unsatisfactory box-office conditions which the film industry is experiencing, is the narrow mental range of its story material. Seldom is the public given a picture with a thought in it, one which gets any distance from the boy-meetsgirl formula or the thrill of physical action. Notable exceptions have been You Can't Take It With You and The Citadel. Each of them had a definite social theme, each in essence was a preachment. The former was a box-office sensation and the latter, in spite of its being made abroad, was a pronounced boxoffice success in this country. The two of them have demonstrated that the public has no objection to entertainment which makes it think. The general avoidance of such themes by the industry as a whole, however, has constituted an invitation to people outside the industry to adopt them, an invitation which an organization has been formed to accept. Listed among the sponsors of the project are United States Senator Arthur Capper, Rexford G. Tugwell, Thomas Mann, Dr. Mary E. Woolley, Henry Pratt Fairchild, Abraham Flexner, Dr. A. A. Brill, Heywood Broun, Irene Lewisohn, Robert K. Straus, Philip Merivale, Sherwood Anderson, Herman Shumlin, Clyde R. Miller, Walter Prichard Eaton, Marc Connelly, Rex Ingram, George Seldes, Will Rogers, Jr., and Fredric March. As outlined, the viewpoints of the organization are: "Progressive Americans in every field now recognize the urgent necessity for a new kind of motion picture which will dramatize from the progressive viewpoint the timely and vital issues of today. To safeguard and extend American democracy is the paramount issue of the post-Munich period. The motion picture screen, with its daily audience of many millions, must now be used to reaffirm and popularize in dramatic form the principles of democratic government and thereby to combat the sinister spread of intolerance and reaction.'

Entertainment Not Ignored . . .

WHILE the main purpose of these pictures will be to carry a message to the public, their sponsors realize that the message must be sugar-coated with entertainment if it is to prove acceptable to the audiences which view them. "Films for Democracy" is the name of the new organization, the executive secretary of which is Samuel J. Rodman, who makes

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this statement: "We expect to have the advice and services of some of the most progressive people in Hollywood. Already we have on our advisory committee such persons as Walter F. Wanger, the producer: Dudley Nichols, scenarist: Fredric March and Fritz Lang. Naturally we will be guided by the advice of experienced people in the selection of our scenarios and the production of our pictures." The organization committee of the movement is headed by Dr. Ned H. Dearborn, dean of the Division of General Education of New York University. Motion Picture Herald quotes Dr. Dearborn as stating that, "Films for Democracy did not intend to promote the doctrines of any particular party except as these doctrines might coincide with the viewpoint of progressives all over the country." On the face of it, Films for Democracy would appear to be a broadminded movement with the single aim of making better Americans of all of us by enlisting our support in stemming the advance of doctrines, beliefs and isms which run contrary to the spirit of the principles upon which the United States Constitution is founded. As such, one would think it would receive the unselfish and friendly support of the film industry as evidence of its loyalty to American traditions.

Messrs. Quigley and Ramsaye . . .

QUIGLEY publications, by virtue of drawing their sole support from the major picture producing organizations, may justly be regarded as expressing the industry's attitude toward any movement which affects it. Mr. Quigley himself has this to say in his Motion Picture Daily: "Every propagandist, Left, Right or Center, should be given clearly to understand that it will be agreeable to the motion picture industry to have him hire a hall and leave the entertainment screen alone. There might also be a message for collaborators on such ventures who enjoy a handsome income from the industry." In the impos-ing Motion Picture Herald, Terry Ramsaye, Mr. Quigley's editor, indulges in a berserker rage that is positively funny. Listen to this: "Now an assortment of New Dealers, Misdealers and intellectual shell-and-pea pitchmen want to unfold their keesters on the motion picture stage to hold forth on the merits of their assorted brands of social gamble, rattlesnake oil and panaceas for the sure relief of the economic and social chilblains, rheumatism, fallen arches and brick dust in the urine that they and the likes of them have been creating for us. That is what they would substitute for entertainment." Although my dictionary is so large it runs around the library on a scooter, it does not contain the word "keester," consequently I am not in a position to challenge the aptness of Ramsaye's reference to it, but if Films for Democracy is interfering with his bodily functions it is high time he applied to the courts for an order to make Dr. Dearborn and assocates cease and desist.

Pity the Poor Exhibitor . . .

MORE of the Terrible Terry: "This is said to be a land of free speech and expression. It is a land of a free screen. . . . it is proper to contend that the

sponsors of Films for Democracy have a perfect right to get into production and purvey their wares. They have. But also they insist by the primary announcement that they have decided to do it on the existing amusement screen. They do not announce that they are founding an activity, but rather unconsciously declare that they are going to seek to break into and declare themselves into an existing business and institution. It's a muscle-in program." There speaks a sycophantic press. If the theory it advances became a fact, from now until the end of time there would not be one addition to the number of business organizations already existing in the United States. But let us get along to another of Terrible Terry's tantrums: "Superimposed upon the many commercial and policy problems of today's theatre operation, the showman will find himself presently required to take a position, or exercise judgment, with reference to sides of many or all of the issues of the day—on some of which he may not be an expert, and concerning matters that can in no event contribute to his gross revenue or net profit." That, being translated, means that when a Films for Democracy production comes his way, the exhibitor will not concern himself with its box-office possibilities as entertainment, but must concern himself solely with his individual stand on the social message it subtly conveys, that if he were opposed in principle to the theme of You Can't Take It With You he should have refused to show it even though he knew it would be a box-office winner. Messrs. Quigley and Ramsaye will be applauded by the film industry for their adherence to the principle that what is bought and paid for should be delivered, but if I were the buyer of, and payer for, such support, I am quite sure I would demand something with not so many holes in it.

GOES A LITTLE TOO FAR . . .

NEWS from Lincoln, Nebraska, appearing in Daily Variety, informs us that Lincoln Theatre Corporation "is furthering the nightmare cycle," by putting Men With Wings and Mars Attacks the World on the same bill. While my opinion of Men With Wings, as recorded in my review, is that "it does not quite hit the mark," I think Variety goes a little too far in suggesting it can add anything to a nightmare cycle.

BUSINESS UP AND DOWN . . .

TWO interesting official dispatches from Washington appeared side by side in some newspapers a couple of weeks ago. One was to the effect that the revenue from the amusement tax, an infallible record of what motion picture theatre box-offices are taking in, "took the biggest nose-dive of the year, compared with the figures for the corresponding month of 1937," as the dispatch in Daily Variety reads. Eight of the ten months up to and including October of this year, did poorer business than during the same month last year. The other dispatch I have reference to carries this heading in Los Angeles Examiner: "U. S. Business at Highest 1938 Level."

While general business has been going up, the film business has been going down during the period in which it has been making the greatest exploitation splurge in its history. What the Spectator said would happen, has happened. When Hollywood gets back into the business of making motion pictures, the public will get back into the theatres. The film industry would have an out now if it had stuck to its original initials; it would be in a position to shrug its shoulders and claim that, after all, the whole quizz contest splurge was merely a MAYBE proposition.

RUNS TRUE TO FORM . . .

CEEMS to me there is no reason why the press I should get excited over Sam Goldwyn's acquisition of Jimmy Roosevelt as a new vice-president for Goldwyn Productions. It conforms to an old Hollywood custom. Novels and plays are purchased for the box-office value of their names and even though their plots are of no earthly good as story material. The Roosevelt name is box-office; Jimmy is willing to sell it; Sam is willing to buy it, and if Jimmy keeps out of the way so those who makes Sam's pictures will not continually be tripping over him, the investment may prove a good one. A favorable economic aspect of the deal is that by the time Sam has got the full exploitation value for the money spent in paying Jimmy what is laughingly referred to as his salary, the same exploitation will enable the young man to sell his name to someone else at a still higher price. About that time, if not sooner, Sam probably will be so fed up with his vice-president he will be glad to see him go, and the additional money will make Jimmy glad to go; so, all in all, to me it looks like a pretty sweet deal.

DAUBER BECOMES PICTURE NEWS . . .

WITH the Santa Anita opening only a few days away. Hollywood picture. away, Hollywood picture minds are veering towards their main winter occupation. An illuminating illustration of how deeply screen people are interested in the running of the horses at the famous track, was given in Louella Parson's Examiner column recently. Mixed in with her picture news items

was the announcement that Dauber, one of the better race horses, had arrived at Santa Anita and looked promising. When my eye first caught the name I thought I was going to read that the horse was to play in a picture, but the paragraph merely recorded his arrival, leaving us to infer that he was going to confine himself to playing with picture money. When the coming of a race horse is motion picture news, it makes us wonder what is going to happen to motion pictures when all the horses get here and begin their annual romping around the Santa Anita track.

If They Must Have Horses . . .

WHEN I was a boy the speed with which a horse could trot was greater news than the speed with which a horse could run. My own conception of the greatest speed any horse ever attained, is that developed by Long Tom, who, attached to a butcher's cart in which I awaited the return of my chum, the butcher's son, from the back door of a house at which he was delivering meat, got it into his head to beat it down the street for some reason he did not share with me. My pulling on the reins produced only increased speed; but I discovered that I could steer him, and I steered him right into the rear side of the railway station which marked the end of the street. All of which has nothing to do with the fact that I was going to say that the owner of a trotting horse can get more pleasure out of it than he could get out of a whole stableful of running horses. If Louis Mayer and Harry Warner invested in trotters, they could take the reins themselves and race against one another, which would be more fun than leaning on the rail at the Santa Anita club house and inwardly praying for greater speed on the part of their race horses which they could not recognize if all jockeys were attired alike. There is something in the feel of the reins which make you one with your trotting horse, a something you never can thrill to by virtue of owning a runner. Trotting races for women drivers are no novelty. It will not be long until a halfmile, privately owned race course for trotters will be available to picture people, and I miss my guess if they do not go for it in a big way. I cannot see what fun there is in owning a running horse which

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only stable boys and jockeys ride, but I can see whole heaps of fun in owning a trotter and driving it yourself.

America's First Sweetheart . . .

UNGRACIOUS return it would be for occasions upon which I have enjoyed the hospitality of Pickfair, if I said anything to dim the luster of the title an admiring public conferred upon the gracious lady whose personality it expresses, but, even so, I have to break to Mary the news that the first "America's Sweetheart" was a horse. But Mary need not be discomfited. It was a darned good horseor, to be precise, mare. I read all about her in Golden Hoofs, a book by William Carey Duncan. Her name was Goldsmith Maid. She was foaled in 1857, which, if she still were living, would make her about as old as some of the horses I bet on last winter at Santa Anita seemed to be. Her first season of competitive trotting was when she was nine years old. She won \$20,000. Then she was supposed to be through; she was lame, hard to handle, showing affection only for her groom and for a mongrel dog whom she refused to let out of her sight except when she was on the track. But she perked up, and during the next four years won \$125,000 in purses, established a record of 2.17 for the mile, a figure she reduced to 2.14 when she was fifteen years old. By that time the whole country was nutty about her; she was called The Maid Supreme, Queen of the Turf, and-America's Sweetheart. Her owners were forced to place guards around her stall to keep away her admirers who fought for nails from her shoes and hairs from her tail. She retired from competition when she was twenty and after she had won in purses a total of-get ready, you local horse owners -\$325,000! Isn't that an all-time high? . . . The moral of all this is that there is money in trotters, they live longer and give you a lot more fun than the dainty gallopers you run to death before they are half the age America's Sweetheart was when she began to compete.

CHARLIE WILL HIT HITLER . . .

PAPERS had it that Charlie Chaplin had abandoned his plan to caricature Hitler in the picture he hopes to start shooting next month, the reason advanced being that the Hays organization had frowned on the idea of irritating Germany's maniac while international diplomacy was in a state of turmoil. There is no truth in the report. Charlie will wear the little black moustache when he plays a dictator, and it will be up to the audience to see him or not to see him as Hitler, whichever it prefers. I have rather good authority for my denial of the newspaper stories: Charlie himself.

COMMENDABLE CONTRIBUTIONS . . .

* *

VASTLY commendable is the action of those screen people who are contributing their talent to a radio program in order to swell the revenue of the Motion Picture Relief Fund. More than in any other city in

which a great industry is centered, is Hollywood in need of a large and stable relief fund for the needy among those who work for the film industry. It is the most heartless industry in the world, perhaps the only one in which faithful service means nothing in the way of assurance of permanent employment. On the Boulevard this morning I met Herbert Mundin. I cannot recall when I last saw him on the screen. I do not mean even to insinuate that he is a candidate for relief; on the contrary, he informed me he was having a fine time buying Christmas presents, but as I left him I recalled the scores of excellent performances he had contributed to pictures. As much satisfactory service to any other industry in existence would have assured him continuous employment; to the film industry it means nothing. Still using Herbert as a symbol, talent scouts are scouring the country for actors to fill roles for which he is much better qualified by ability and experience. And you can multiply him by several hundred to reach all the actors and actresses who are victims of the industry's heartlessness and lack of ordinary business sense. The Herbert Mundins have millions of friends among film fans; the people who take their places on the screen are in the same position as the Mundins were years ago when they started and had to spend years in making their friends. There are not many people in pictures who are secure in a material way. There always will be need for the Motion Picture Relief Fund, and it is the duty of those who are fortunate enough to be able to do it, to contribute their bit to assure its ability to meet all the demands made upon it. Those contributing to the radio programs are doing their bit.

DANCING AND DIALOGUE . . .

 H^{IS} letter on the whole is most flattering, but one of the first-flight directors wants to know why, in my review of one of his pictures, I took him to task for his direction of a dance sequence in which two principals spoke intimate lines on the dance floor. "You see the same thing in lots of pictures," he writes, "but I haven't seen the same criticism in any other publication, which leads me to believe that you are the only critic it offends." The mood of a scene should govern both its locale and its action. If two players present a scene in which the mood is preserved by its regard for its inherent intimacy, it follows that the lines in it must be read in intimate tones to suggest the characters realize they must not be overheard. In the many dance scenes to which I object, two players, with the tips of their noses almost touching, discuss intimate matters in tones which suggest their ignorance of the fact that other dancers are touching elbows with them. That totally dissipates the mood the scene should sustain. The scene is made more aggravating by the fact that not another dancer on the floor is saying a word, that all of them are shuffling along in wooden-faced silence which heightens the absurdity of the loud tones in which the principals converse. There is less directorial intelligence displayed in handling dance sequences than is displayed in any other detail of direction. When activity on a dance floor is advisable for its value as a spectacle, the characters who have dialogue to advance the story should leave the floor and do their talking in a secluded spot to which the dancers in the distance could serve as a background. . . . Oddly enough, after the above was put in type I found in *Dramatic School* exactly the treatment I suggest here for a dance sequence.

MYSTERY OF THE PARKED CAR . . .

THE other evening I left my car in the parking lot of the Bond Market, on Ventura, near Laurel Canyon Boulevard, while I went into the market, called a conference of department heads to determine what we should feed the two cats a frankly fickle female feline foisted on us, when the two refused to eat more of what we had been feeding them. I got something, drove home, and on the floor in the back of the car found a tennis racket with a smoothly worn handle, its tip taped and its stringed part in a clamped frame. Will the person who put it in my car please send me some balls and a tennis court and come up some time and play with me? Or perhaps it would be simpler if he called at the Spectator office and identified the racket.

WORDS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT . . .

A FEW years ago I was a guest at a dinner given by the Faculty Club of Columbia University, New York. I was asked to speak and in the course of my remarks a professor asked me how I would define a motion picture. I gave my definition. Later I was told by several of the guests that the definition was the most concise and illuminating they had heard. For years I had been searching mentally for a definition which would express precisely and briefly my conception of a motion picture, and I was somewhat proud of the fact that upon the spur of the moment I had hit upon exactly what I wanted, proud because it is difficult to put in a few words exactly what the entertainment picture is, and at last I had done it to the satisfaction of such a highly intellectual group as I had addressed. Ever since that night I have tried to recall just how my definition was worded, and also have been trying to form another that would satisfy me, but so far, no luck.

HOW RADIO HURTS PICTURES . . .

ONE of the oft repeated contentions of the Spectator is that the film business suffers because of the manner in which pictures and picture people are presented in radio broadcasts. At a recent convention of the Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America, the organized influence of producing organizations as exhibitors, the annual report pointed out that, "the appearance of film stars on radio has increased alarmingly in the past year; that stars are frequently presented to radio audiences in hastily prepared material

and poorly presented skits, and that stars have appeared on the air in synopses of current picture productions; that certain producers are encouraging these star appearances in additional excerpts from story material, and that, as was predicted by MPTOA last year, certain stars have definitely destroyed themselves as box-office attractions by radio appearances."

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

WHEN the Spaniel was a puppy I used to take him on my lap. Can anyone tell me how to impress upon a full grown dog that he no longer is a lap dog? . . . Just been informed my bed will not be made at the usual time this morning; the two cats are asleep on it. . . . A North Hollywood marquee: Time Out for Murder, Sisters. . . . Have moved to my chair on the front lawn to continue my writing; handicapped at the moment by the position of Granddaughter Wendy astride my shoulders, playing that I am a horsie. . . The Brown Derby rasp-berry ice is delicious. . . Read Ed Durling in Los Angeles Times regularly; wish he would explain his prejudice against the use of question marks; but occasionally he grows careless; in one column last week there were eight questions and two of them had question marks tacked onto them. . . . I see someone is going to make a picture dealing with the marriage of a woman with a man younger than herself. Don't think I'll see it; would recall too vividly one of the great sorrows of my life. She was nine and I was seven and I loved her. I nearly ran into her while skating and icily she remarked that babies should not be allowed to crowd grown-up skaters. And we were skating on a lake! It hurt. She was the daughter of the town night watchman and ultimately married a butcher. When a few years ago I saw how big she was, I thought how fortunate her husband was in being able to feed her meat at wholesale prices. . . . A short street near our place is being paved; when it is finished, I no longer will have to drive past Perry Leiber's house and be sneered at by his children's pet monkey. . . . The greatest Christmas present I ever received was given to me by a clergyman two days before Christmas in 1908; presentation took place in a church and the gift has been my most cherished possession ever since, growing in value during each of the thirty years. My public name for what the clergyman gave me is Mrs. Spectator. . . . The sun was setting when we reached the bridge across the Avon when one goes from Oxford to Stratford; the western sky was ablaze with color which dyed the water below us and put a brilliant fringe on the leaves of trees which lined both banks. Back against the sun stood the church in which Shakespeare is buried. We sat spellbound by the beauty of it when our car stopped on the bridge; then we went on, and not long after, I stood by myself in the room in which the Bard of Avon was born, gazed on the bed on which the birth took place, and experienced what I think is the greatest thrill a man who writes could have.

DIFFERENT APPEALS OF STAGE AND SCREEN

BEGINNING in its issue of February 27, 1937, the Spectator presented a series of articles setting forth the editor's conception of the fundamentals of screen art. Requests for the issues in which the articles appeared continue to come in, although the supply long ago became exhausted. Since they appeared the circulation of the Spectator has increased until now it is approximately three times what it was in February of last year, which means that of three present subscribers, two have not read the articles. Many who did read them are among those who since have requested complete sets. We feel therefore, that a useful service will be performed by the re-publication of the whole series. The second article is presented herewith. The first appeared in our issue of November 26.

ENTERTAINMENT is recreation. We seek it to meet the demand for relief from the mental and physical exactions of our daily pursuits, to freshen by rest our brains and bodies to the end that they may respond more readily to the strain put upon them by the efforts involved in following the careers which provide us with the necessities of life. Entertainment is anything which takes us out of our outer world and recreates in us the impulse to meet with greater zest the demands of our daily occupations. It is mental and physical house-cleaning to restore the normal efficiency of our minds and bodies to the point of their functioning to their full capacity. Our minds and bodies are co-dependent; they cannot be divorced, each to pursue its independent way. We can think best when our bodies are relaxed; we can relax best when our minds are at rest, when neither disturbs the other by virtue of its greater demand upon our attention.

Mediums Differ Widely . . .

THE arts of the stage and the screen are far apart in all their essentials; the esthetics and demands of one are foreign to the other: but in this discussion stage art serves us as a basis for comparing the two as mediums of entertainment, the purpose being to lay the foundation for later discussions of the screen as a separate, individual art which asks nothing from its nearest of kin. Our discussions are not to deal exclusively with the esthetic demands of the two arts. Both of them have been commercialized to a greater extent than any of the other arts except architecture. A stage or screen artist cannot buy a canvas for a few pennies, take it to a garret and express himself on it with pigments and brushes. His creations demand a broader canvas, the expenditure of money, the help of others who must be paid. A photoplay means nothing when it is just some sheets of paper. It has to be put on film to be sold to the public as entertainment in order that it may bring back the money it cost, to enable another to be presented. While a stage play

may be satisfactory reading, it cannot reach its ultimate market until it is produced.

Must Take Practical View . . .

CO WE must not lose ourselves in a maze of abstract musings on the screen as an art and overlook its financial aspect. In essence the screen is a manufacturing business, governed by the general laws of supply and demand, whose rules must be observed as all other industries observe them. From such angle is our approach. The public buys most what it wants most. The market established for screen entertainment is many hundreds of times greater than the peak market established by the stage. The ease of distribution will be advanced by the champion of the art of the stage to explain the screen's greater commercial importance. Here we encounter the first of the basic laws of business which will enter into our agruments. The public will not buy a thing it does not want solely because it can buy it easily. There is no appeal from the law of supply and demand; if the public demanded stage plays, the supply would be forthcoming. Enough money is being spent on screen entertainment in every community in the country today to support a stock company to meet a demand for a living theatre if such demand existed. Why, then, did the screen, in twenty-five years, assume a hundred times the commercial importance the stage assumed in twenty-five centuries? To find our answer, let us examine both the market and the merchandise the screen and the stage have for sale.

What the Stage Demands . . .

IF OUR purpose in patronizing either be our desire for relaxation, it would follow that we will patronize most the one which permits us to relax most. When we analyze both, we find the stage demands our active, and the screen our passive, intellectual cooperation. The relaxation we can derive from any form of entertainment is lessened by the degree in which our intellects are called upon to participate in it actively. We can be stimulated tremendously by our reaction to purely intellectual appeal; our critical faculties can be exercised to our satisfaction in comparing Leslie Howard's Hamlet with that of John Gielgud; but if we are to obtain the greatest pleasure from such mental exercises, our minds must be fresh when we approach them. Stimulating a tired mind does not bring it rest. When we view a stage play, our minds must be alert; our senses of attention and memory must function actively if we are to get all the play offers. Only by close attention can we fixate the essential point in a given scene in the first act, and only by the functioning of our memories can we be aware of its relation to an incident in the closing act. The complete composition of each act is before us for the full duration of the interval between the rise and fall of the curtain. The stage has devices for directing our attention to the essential point, but we

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must be alert in looking for the direction and following it to the desired spot in the composition. A moment of inattention may make us miss the story value of a scene. We cannot be aware the initials on a handkerchief protruding from the pocket of a player is the clue which finally reveals him as an impostor. Our attention must be drawn to it. The rest of the composition cannot be blotted out to leave it as the only object within our range of vision.

Further Demands of Stage . . .

STAGE play can proceed in only one directionforward. It cannot back-track from the third act to the first to emphasize a point not stressed upon its initial appearance. If the incident of the handkerchief had no significance until the third act was reached, its presence in the first act—too trivial then to have attracted our attention—would have to be recalled by dialogue and action in the later scene. Off-stage action—a disturbance in the street which a player sees by looking out a window in the setmust be described to us in words. The geography of a play is rigid; the audience is stationary. When we view a play, our attention and imagination must function competently if we are to get the full dramatic significance of off-stage incidents related to us, and the functioning of our memory is essential to their proper placing in the drama as it unfolds. It will be seen, then, that the stage is purely intellectual entertainment with a mixture of real and unreal elements. The players are real people; the forest in the background is a painting. The social demands of the stage are arbitrary. We must be in our seats before the play begins. Owing to the centralization of theatres, almost invariably in business districts, we have to go a considerable distance to reach the one of our choice. The play consumes the entire evening. Attending it is not a mere incident in our social routine; it is an event, perhaps the inspiration for a dinner party or supper afterwards.

What Is a Motion Picture? . . .

WHEN we regard the theatre from the standpoint of physiological psychological of physiological psychology, and if there be any logic in our reasoning thus far, we cannot escape the conclusion that the reason for the stage drama's failure to establish and maintain an audience as great as that assembled by the screen, is its failure to provide the relaxation of mind we can enjoy only by patronizing a form of entertainment which takes us from the outer world of our daily interest to an inner one of its own. The stage is an aloof art whose footlights and proscenium arch bid us stand back and regard it from a distance. We can enjoy a stage presentation as much as we can a photoplay of equal merit, but owing to the theatre's lack of the desirable restful quality, we have no inclination to patronize it as frequently as we do the cinema. Now let us compare the components of the motion picture with those of the stage play. At the outset we encounter a major difficulty: what is a motion picture? Is it the photograph of a stage play we are getting now in every picture house we attend, a form which tells its story in dialogue? Or is it a creation which speaks to us in pictorial language, with the smallest possible reliance on audible dialogue as its medium of expression? If we regard it as the former, further discusson would be bootless, for the talkie is not art and the laws of no art can be applied to it. It is a misshapen, illegitimate offspring of a misalliance between the stage and the motion picture camera.

When Sound Came to Pictures . . .

 \mathbf{n}^{UR} quest is for a form of screen entertainment which, by meeting most completely the public's demand for mental relaxation, will yield the greatest box-office revenue. As the screen's vast supremacy over the stage as a box-office attraction was established when the mechanical limitations of the former forced it to tell its stories visually and without resort to audible dialogue, it should follow that when sound came to pictures it should have been handled in a manner to cause the least possible disturbance to the elements of established box-office value, that Hollywood should have continued to make motion pictures, with reliance on audible dialogue only sufficient to expedite the telling of their stories. But the screen went over wholly to talkies. As we proceed with our arguments we will differentiate the two by referring to them as motion pictures and talkies. The fundamental differences between the two are what we are seeking to discover for the purpose of determining their relative box-office values. The talkie speaks the language of the stage, the limitations of whose appeal we have established. When we set the screen apart and examine it, we find it has nothing in common with the older art. To argue they are alike because both use actors is as unreasonable as arguing that a building and a pavement are alike because both use concrete, or that money and newspapers are alike because both use paper. We have to look further than the externals of the talkie and the motion picture if we are to discover their differ-

Camera Has No Limitations . . .

THE appeals of the two arts are as far apart as it is possible for them to be. The stage demands intellectual response, the screen purely emotional response; the former makes its appeal through the aural sense, the latter through the visual sense. What we see is less strain on our faculties than what is conveyed to us in words; listening is more exacting than seeing. The screen's demands on our attention and memory are reduced to a minimum by its mechanics. When the initials on the handkerchief are the clue to the situation, the camera moves forward until all the rest of the composition disappears and we see only the corner of the handkerchief; when our attention should be on one actor in a group, the camera picks him out for us. When it is necessary we should know what the player at the window sees in the street, the camera takes us to the street and we see for ourselves. The screen annihilates time and space. It can take us from the last reel back to the first to rid memory of the task of recalling an earlier

incident, and place emphasis on the incident at the exact moment when the story demands it be most emphatic. It can knit simultaneous action so closely we have the impression of being in several different locations at the same time. By sharp cutting from a boy caught in a beleaguered Spanish city, to his mother in California and his father in Hong Kong, both anxious for his safety, we feel we are with all three simultaneously by having overcome time, space and causality. This one power alone separates the screen so widely from the stage that the two still would belong to totally different schools of art if in all other respects they were alike.

Good Devices Abandoned . . .

WHEN, with talkies, the screen abandoned silence, it abandoned devices of value to it. The "flashabandoned devices of value to it. The "flash-back," "iris-in" or "iris-out" never is seen now and rarely was seen during the decade preceding the coming of sound, yet all of them were potent instruments for making it easier to follow screen stories. The reason for the abandonment casts an interesting light on picture producer psychology. The flash-back and iris are considered to be old-fashioned. No other reason has been advanced. No intelligent reason can be advanced. The motion picture makes no social demands. We can enter and leave a picture house when we please, and we do not have to go far in our search of one. In the silent days we developed the attendance habit; it did not matter greatly what our favorite house was showing. Our imagination fashioned our entertainment from the material the screen provided, and the picture had to be a poor one indeed to lack sufficient stimulation to make imaginations function. Since the talkies came, we have learned to shop, our attendance is less regular and boxoffice receipts show greater fluctuation. Such is the result of our being deprived of the enjoyment of entertaining ourselves. We have to accept a talkie as it is presented to us. It is factual. It offers nothing to the imagination.

Screen's Most Potent Element . . .

 $m{B}^{UT}$ as yet we have not put our finger on the factor mainly responsible for the screen's supremacy, have not segregated the element more potent than any other in establishing it as the world's leading entertainment medium. This element is intimacy. We are thrilled by a play; we lose ourselves in a book; we stand back and imagine ourselves walking in the cool shades of a sylvan glen an artist has put on canvas: we forget ourselves, and our emotions control us as we listen to the playing of a great symphony all are arts which parade in front of us to compel our emotional response, which flaunt their attractions with words, paint and sound; they are not intimate arts which completely take us from our outer world to their own inner one, which embrace us, which place chairs for us at the table upon which they spread their feasts. Screen art makes no pretensions. It does not parade for our inspection, beats no tomtoms to attract our attention. It creates nothing. It simply hooks its arm in ours and takes us places with it that we may see what it sees; it leads us into the palace of the king and the hovel of the beggar, it places us beside the bride and groom at the altar; beside the murderer as he climbs the gallows steps and the shipmaster as he guides his vessel through the storm; it takes us to the lowest level of a coal mine, and places us in the first line of attack in a football game.

Screen Art Creates Nothing . . .

PEOPLE in studios build the palace and the hovel, the gallows and the ship. That is not screen art. The palace is an expression of the art of architecture and is but an element of screen art, as ultra-marine is an element in a painter's color combination. The man on the throne is not a king. He is an actor expressing the art of acting. Thus screen art creates nothing. It absorbs the creations of all other arts, blends them, and makes their unreality seem real. It derives its strength as an entertainment medium from its power to achieve a more nearly perfect illusion of reality than any of the older arts are capable of. The camera is the instrument which expresses screen art, thus it is the art of photography which gives screen art its visual beauty. Here let me make even more clear what I mean when I say screen art creates nothing. A painter sets his easel on a hilltop and records on canvas his interpretation of the valley below; a sculptor works in his studio and out of cold marble carves the head of a beautiful child; a weaver expresses his art in a majestic tapestry. A motion picture artist composes an arresting interior in which the painting, the marble and the tapestry play an important part. But even his composition means nothing, is not screen art, until it is expressed by still another art, that of photography.

Perfect Illusion of Reality . . .

THE camera is screen art's instrument for leading us I into screen scenes, for placing us in immediate contact with a story's characters until we lose all sense of being spectators and become participants in the drama; it enables us to overhear intimate conversations and to look into the eyes of characters to learn thoughts which do not need to be told us in words. It is the camera which makes the screen the least aloof of all the arts, the only art which permits us to have a hand in fashioning its creations, for it is what we put into a true motion picture which makes complete its power to entertain us, not what it itself has to offer. We are participants in motion pictures. We are spectators of talkies. Everything we see in a motion picture is real to us because there is nothing real to disturb the perfect illusion of reality. On the stage the actors are real, as I already have said, and the scenery is make-believe. On the screen the actors, the scenery, the land beneath and the sky above are of the same quality, neither tangible nor plasticmerely shadows which float across the screen, and we float along with them on the stream of fancies they create, are enveloped by them, are part of them, so

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complete is their unity, so perfect the illusion of real-

ity they create and maintain.

(Our next discussion will deal with the Illusion of Reality, what it means, how the injection of reality destroys it, its importance as an element of screen art.)

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

MERVYN'S MASTERPIECE ...

● DRAMATIC SCHOOL: MGM; producer, Mervyn LeRoy; director, Robert Sinclair; screen play, Ernest Vadja and Mary McCall, Jr.; original play, Hans Szekely and Zoltan Egyed: photographer, William Daniels; sets, Cedric Gibbons and Gabriel Scognamillo; set decorations, Edwin B. Willis; gowns, Adrian; film editor, Fredrick Y. Smith. Cast: Luise Rainer, Paulette Goddard, Alan Marshal, Lana Turner, Genevieve Tobin, Anthony Allan, Henry Stephenson, Gale Sondergaard, Melville Cooper, Erik Rhodes, Virginia Grey, Ann Rutherford, Hans Conried, Rand Brooks, Jean Chatburn, Marie Blake, Cecilia C. Callejo, Margaret Dumont, Frank Puglia, Dorothy Granger, Running time, 78 minutes.

NE of the finest talking pictures of this or any other season, one which, in dignifying stage art, lends dignity to screen art. By sheer brilliance of writing, directing and acting, it takes a single-idea story and weaves it into dramatically gripping screen entertainment; it makes big scenes out of what on paper would read as almost casual incidents without much story significance. Of, from and about the stage, directed by a former stage director with but one previous picture to his credit, it nevertheless derives its strength as screen entertainment by strictness of its regard for the demands of the medium in which it now expresses itself. It is a critics' picture as well as one which should have wide popular appeal. Physically, it is highly attractive. Adorned with sets designed by that master craftsman, Cedric Gibbons, and his associate, Gabriel Scognamillosets whose architectural beauty is emphasized by the manner in which Edwin Willis has dressed themit has added visual attractiveness in the persons of a score of girls who as a group shatter screen traditions by being both beautiful and talented. The whole production, both animate and inanimate, gave Willian Daniels photographic opportunities of which he availed himself in a highly artistic manner.

Luise Rainer's Fine Performance . . .

WITHOUT a single irritation of the kind which sprinkles so many otherwise satisfactory pictures—loud dialogue, too many close-ups, clumsy grouping—Dramatic School moves along at a smooth and steady pace which is a tribute to the excellence of its film editing by Fredrick Y. Smith. In short, it is a technical as well as a dramatic masterpiece. As dramatic as anything else in it, is its revelation of a new Luise Rainer, a vibrant, emotionally appealing young girl with an impelling ambition to become a great actress. It is a purely mental characterization, a scintillating one of lights and shade enacted with a brilliance which makes us believe no one else could have played the part so convincingly. Even though

playing an actress, Miss Rainer makes us forget the actress and think only of the girl. As co-star, Paulette Goddard takes a long step forward in realizing the possibilities hinted at in her first screen appearance and emphasized in her second. Possessed of both beauty and brains, as well as an expressive speaking voice, she here has a characterization dominated by petty meanness for its greatest footage and developing into sympathetic emotion before the picture ends. She is in complete command of each of her scenes and takes her place among Hollywood actresses for whom brilliant careers may safely be predicted.

Sinclair's Outstanding Direction . . .

DIRECTION by Robert Sinclair has the sympathetic and understanding quality which can be responsible for only intelligent and convincing performances. A score of names are listed in the cast, too many for the individual mention the work of each player entitles him or her to. Alan Marshall is excellent in one of the principal motivating parts, Genevieve Tobin is scintillating in a brief appearance, and Marie Blake registers strongly as Luise Rainer's loyal friend. Among the distinguished performances is included that of Gale Sondergaard. A boy who gives promise is Rand Brooks who has the odd role of a youth who is a failure as an actor, odd because he does it so well he proves himself an excellent actor. Others whose parts and performances make them stand out are Henry Stephenson, Melville Cooper and Erik Rhodes. The screen play by Ernest Vajda and Mary C. McCall, Jr., is a beautiful bit of screen writing. The sum total of the whole production is a triumph for the eternally young Mervyn LeRoy. Dramatic School is not quite like anything else he has done, but it is to be hoped he gives us others like it. It is his first for Metro and is a tribute to that organization's sagacity in securing him to produce for it.

NOTABLE CINEMATIC EVENT . . .

● THE BEACHCOMBER; Paramount release of Pommer-Laughton production; produced and directed by Erich Pommer; screen play by Bartlett Cormack; original story, "Vessel of Wrath," by W. Somerset Maugham; scenario, B. Val Thal; musical director, Muir Mathieson; music by Richard Addinsell; photography, Jules Kruger; film editor, Robert Hamer, assistant director, Edward Baird. Stars Charles Laughton. Supporting cast: Elsa Lanchester, Tyrone Guthrie, Robert Newton, Dolly Mollinger, Rosita Garcia, J. Solomon, Fred Groves, Eliot Makeham, Mah Foo, Ley On, D. J. Ward, S. Alley and Dudley (dog). Running time, 80 minutes.

UNDERLINE it as a must-see. Its assets: a psychologically sound story: four brilliant characterizations of widely diversified personalities: perfect direction; producton and photography up to the standard set by the other elements. Bartlett Cormack had a job on his hands to make a smoothly flowing screen play from the Maugham book. The leading man (Laughton). when the story opens, is about as low as a man can get, a drunken beachcomber in ragged clothes which suggest filth. Playing opposite him is a narrow-minded old maid (Elsa Lanchester), a religious zealot with a domineering complex. We are picture-wise enough to

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know that before finis is written to the story, these two will come together, but at the outset it seems impossible. His appearance in itself is enough to repel even a tolerant woman, and hers is enough to dampen the ardor of even a handsome optimist; but so skilfully is the script written, so understanding the direction and so brilliant the performances, the impossible opening becomes the logical ending. It by no means is a drab picture; rather the contrary, as Laughton's performance is rich in the quiet, sardonic comedy of which he long since has shown his mastery.

Pommer Is Himself Again . . .

TRICH POMMER, producer - director of The L Beachcomber, first made an impression on American audiences a dozen years ago when he sent us from Germany a series of the greatest pictures of the silent era. Variety, The Last Laugh, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Metropolis, Waltz Dream. The Blue Angel, Congress Dances and other cinematic masterpieces established his right to recognition as the foremost producer of that time. It was inevitable that he would be lured to Hollywood. He was, and it likewise was inevitable that he would become the victim of Hollywood's belief that its way of doing things was the way all things should be done. He did nothing notable when he first was here for Paramount nor when he came back for Fox, but that was Hollywood's fault, not his. Now he once more is free to do things his way, being associated with Charles Laughton in Mayflower Pictures, whose product Paramount will release in this country. The Beachcomber is the first offering, and as my records show, it is the first picture which Erich himself has directed. In the old days he made directors, did not become one. His direction of Beachcomber is a demonstration of the soundness of the Spectator's conviction that the easiest way to make a picture convincing is to have the players converse with one another instead of indulging in the almost universal Hollywood custom of shouting to reach the audience. Most of Laughton's lines are read in tones a little above a whisper, yet each of them is heard distinctly in all parts of the house. But in every department of direction Pommer proves himself the complete master.

Technically Without a Flaw . . .

VISUAL glamour is another asset of this fine production. The French Riviera doubles for the Dutch East Indies to provide the location, and full advantage is taken of the pictorial possibilities of the stretch of Mediterranean coastline. The whole production is on a comprehensive scale, but always the mood of what we hear matches the mood of what we see. In the main story only four white people figure, and if any picture ever presented four more evenly balanced, more diversified yet interdependent characterizations more convincingly enacted, that picture is among the few important ones I have not seen in the past fifteen years. An extraordinary performance is that of Tyrone Guthrie as a Church of

England curate of nervous disposition. In contrast with the Guthrie characterization is that of Robert Newton as the long-suffering Dutchman who represents his government in ruling the population of the islands the story includes. Repression is the dominating feature of Newton's performance; its very quietness and lack of effort giving it powerful appeal. Miss Lanchester long ago proved herself a really great actress and in this picture ably sustains her reputation. Technically, Beachcomber is flawless, the photography being notable for a remarkable demonstration of the part lighting can play in heightening dramatic effect.

JOE IN A SPANISH SETTING . . .

● FLIRTING WITH FATE; David L. Loew; associate producer, Edward Gross; director, Frank McDonald; screen play, Joseph Moncure March, Ethel La Blanche, Charlie Melson and Harry Clark; based on a story by Dan Jarrett and A. Dorian Otvos; photographer, George Schneiderman; assistant director, Russell Matthews; film editor, Robert O. Crandall; musical director, Victor Young. Cast: Joe E. Brown, Leo Carrillo, Beverly Roberts, Wynne Gibson, Steffi Duna, Charles Judels, Stanley Fields, Leonid Kinskey, Chris Martin, Inez Palange, Irene Franklin, Jay Novello, George Humbert, Lew Kelly, Philip Trent, Ann Hovey, Dick Botiller, Carlos Villerias. Running time, 70 minutes.

ONE Joe E. Brown picture is pretty much like another, but this one is somewhat different and considerably better than the others I have seen since Joe went under the management of an independent producer. Flirting With Fate has definite atmosphere-Mexican, or, at all events, Spanish—and is enlivened by appropriate singing and instrumental music. Physically it has wide sweep and crowds of people in picturesque Spanish costumes, the pictorial possibilities of which are realized strikingly by the superb photography of George Schneiderman. And Joe has been given a better than usual cast headed by the inimitable Leo Carrillo and containing such well known names as Beverly Roberts, Wynne Gibson, Steffi Duna, Charles Judels, Stanley Fields, Leonid Kinskey and Irene Franklin. Some of them have little to do, but all of them give thoroughly satisfactory performances. Joe, of course, is in fine form, particularly in a drunk sequence in which he is hilariously funny. Another high spot is his visit to a lion in its cage. His reception by the lion is both thrilling and hilarious. Leo Carrillo, as leader of a bandit gang, proves one of the picture's biggest assets.

Could Attract Greater Audience . . .

A DEFINITE audience always is waiting for a Joe E. Brown production. His fans are loyal and his pictures are aimed right at them. It is something more than clowning that sustains his popularity, a combination of personality and acting ability giving it the endurance responsible for his continued boxoffice success. Every time I see one of Joe's pictures I wonder why his producers do not make an effort to extend his audience. It could be done by strengthening his stories, by making them appeal to a more matured audience while maintaining the brand of

comedy that is carrying them now. There is no one else on the screen quite like Joe, and it would not be difficult to make him even a more valuable boxoffice asset. In Flirting With Fate he was fortunate in having a clever young director in the person of Frank McDonald, who realizes fully all the possibilities of the script which is the joint creation of Joe March, Ethel La Blanche, Charlie Melson and Harry Clark, whose starting point was a story by Dan Jarrett and Dorian Otvos. It is logical that something good should come from such a massing of brains. To Victor Young for his musical direction, Walter Samuels for his original music and Charles Newman for his lyrics goes credit for a large share of the satisfaction the picture will give. The Spanish sets designed by Jack Otterson and John Ewing also contribute their bit.

ONE TO AMUSE YOU . . .

● THANKS FOR EVERYTHING; 20th-Fox production and release; director, William A. Seiter; associate producer, Harry Joe Brown; screen play, Harry Tugend; adaptation, Curtis Kenyon and Art Arthur; based on story by Gilbert Wright; music and lyrics, Mack Gordon and Harry Revel; photography, Lucien Andriot; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Mark-Lee Kirk; film editor, Robert Simpson: musical direction, Louis Silvers. Features: Adolphe Menjou, Jack Oakie, Jack Haley, Arleen Whelan, Tony Martin, Binnie Barnes, George Barbier, Warren Hymer: Supporting cast: Gregory Gaye, Andrew Tombes, Renie Riano, Jan Duggan, Charles Lane, Charles Trowbridge, Frank Sully, Gary Breckner, Paul Hurst, James Flavin, Ed Dearing. Running time, 70 minutes.

WILL make you laugh, thereby achieving the end for which it was created. Give Bill Seiter a story which permits of comedy interpretation, an adequate cast and you can be prepared to sit back comfortably in your theatre seat—if it was built for comfort and keep a grin on your face practically all the time the picture is running. Bill has such a lively sense of humor that a Seiter-directed picture always can entertain you even though it contains story situations with little regard for logic. Thanks for Everything is comedy, farce, social psychology, romance, antiwar propaganda, business, singing and radio broadcasting, all of which Director Seiter mixes and serves in a manner to make you give thanks for everything. You will notice that drama is not included in the list of ingredients, an omission which makes it unnecessary for you to take anything seriously. The players take it seriously, as they must to make it amusing, but it is one of those pictures which entertain you while you view it, but which will permit you to think of something else as you make your way out of the theatre.

Well Cast, Well Acted . . .

ALL the performances are satisfactory. Adolphe Menjou is at his best in a role which fits him neatly, and Jack Oakie is better than usual in a part which is tailored to his measure, although I wish he had taken off his hat when he entered the dressing room of Miss America, whom he had not met previously and with whom he converses most politely with his hat still on his head. How directors permit

such irritations in their pictures is quite beyond me. Binnie Barnes gives a really fine performance, a rather restrained one which does not permit her to display the scintillating comedy sense which delighted the audiences which saw her in Three Blind Mice, in which she shared honors with Joel McCrea, Loretta Young and David Niven. Jack Haley just about steals the show with his characterization as the average American who can sense in advance the ebb and flow of public fancy. Arleen Whelan plays her part nicely, but lacks the glamour to make reasonable the adulation bestowed upon her as "the world's fairest," even though Tony Martin does his best to justify it by his singing of a song written to put the idea over. There are four songs, by the way, all of them among the best numbers which have come from that prolific and talented team, Mack Gordon and Harry Revel. There is other music sprinkled through the production and under the direction of Louis Silvers makes a valuable contribution to the whole. I was impressed by the sound recording by Alfred Bruzlin and Roger Heman, the film editing of Robert Simpson, and the gowns designed by Gwen Wakeling. The camera work of Lucien Andriot, of course, was excellent, as his work always is.

SOME AMUSING MURDERS . . .

● THE LAST WARNING; Universal; producer, Irving Starr; director, Al Rogell; screen play, Edmund L. Hartmann; original, Jonathan Latimer; photographer, George Meehan; art director, Jack Otterson; associate art director, Charles H. Clarke; film editor, Maurice Wright; gowns, Vera West; musical director, Charles Previn. Cast: Preston Foster, Frank Jenks, Joyce Compton, Kay Linaker, E. E. Clive, Frances Robinson, Ray Parker, Robert Page, Albert Dekker, Roland Drew, Clem Wilencheck, Orville Caldwell, Richard Lane. Running time, 62 minutes.

DEPENDS upon how you like your murders. My personal taste runs to gruesome trimmings, somber atmosphere and solemn concentration on the part of the detectives who seek to solve the crime. Murder mysteries in book form constitute one of the most intellectual of all groups of fiction. The intelligent reader of one of them endeavors to outdistance the detective and arrive at the solution of the crime before he does. The same should hold true of a murder mystery used as screen story material; it should be treated seriously, the murder should be the focal point of all the action, and the audience should be permitted to fasten its mind on it. It is not difficult to make such a picture sufficiently gripping to keep its viewers on the edge of their seats and their

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eyes glued on the screen. In my case, at least, The Last Warning did not do this. The woman two seats to the left of me and in the row in front of me, had kept her hat on—or, rather, the odd object which she at the moment was wearing in the place where a woman wears a hat. It started me thinking about hats in film theatres and I donated some time to scanning the heads in the dim light. I spotted twenty-two hats in the limited range of my vision, and while doing so I may have missed a murder or two.

Wrecked By Its Mood . . .

 $m{B}^{UT}$ now, the morning after, I recall two murders and a whole flock of last warnings which kept popping up in the most impossible spots. I recall, too, with pleasure the clever comedy of the two great detectives whose duty it was to solve the mystery of the murders. To them the murders were grand larks, and they had a perfectly delicious time while solving them. As comedians, Preston Foster and Frank Jenks give first-class performances, but as my taste dies not run to mirth with murders, the only intellectual satisfaction the evening gave me was that which I experienced while making my census of the hats. However, I saw enough of the picture to satisfy me that there was enough body to the story to make its unfolding gripping entertainment if it had been directed by someone who could appreciate its values. Al Rogell made a mess of it, made it tiresome and silly. All others who contributed to it are to be commended. Irving Starr, producer, provided it with a complete and attractive production which included some fine examples of Jack Otterson's skill as an art director. Photography by George Meehan also is of high artistic merit. Kay Linaker, E. E. Clive, Joyce Compton and Frances Robinson give thoroughly satisfactory performances. Foster and Jenks, of course, are excellent in the characterizations demanded of them. It is the mood of the picture, not the work of those in it, which wrecks it.

DISTINGUISHED FOR ORIGINALITY . . .

● RIDE A CROOKED MILE (Melodrama); Paramount production and release; director, Alfred E. Green; producer, Jeff Lazarus; associate producer, Dale Van Every; original story and screen play by Ferdinand Reyher and John C. Moffitt: photography, William C. Mellor; process photography, Farciot Edouart: art direction, Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; film editor, James Smith; musical direction, Boris Morros; music by Gregory Stone; assistant director, Harold Schwartz. Cast: Akim Tamiroff, Jeif Erikson, Frances Farmer, Lynne Overman, John Miljan, J. M. Kerrigan, Vladimir Sokoloff. Genia Nikola, Wade Crosby, Robert Gleckler, Nestor Paiva, Archie Twitchell, Gaylord Pendleton, Fred Kohler, Jr. Running time, 70 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

If IT'S novelty you are looking for in screen entertainment, you will find it in Ride a Crooked Mile. The picture has an utterly original spirit, a very strange tone. One feels that anything can happen, and it just about does. Central figure is a wild Cossack, an immigrant who has become eminently successful as a modern cattle rustler, operating his own

packing plant at which the hi-jacked cattle are slaughtered and skinned to remove identification marks. Of a sudden his former wife shows up, returning to him their son, now twenty-one, whom she has found unmanageable. The boy is a chip off the old block; he and his old man go into a bang-up fist fight at their first meeting, after which they take to horses to see which can outride the other. Upon seeing his son has some of his own fire, the Cosack acquires a great affection for the fellow, avows to initiate him into living as practiced in old Russia. From the viewpoint of interior decorating, the sets provided by Hans Dreier and Robert Usher for the Russian's home are probably the most atrocious to reach the screen, a conglomeration of knives and sabres, old lamps and sundry other relics, scattered among vulgarly heavy and ornate furniture; but for the picture all this was just the thing. Oh, yesthere is a girl in the story too, a daughter of a Russian general, who has quarters upstairs, apparently out of charitable impulses on the part of the Cossack.

But Doesn't Keep Its Spirit . . .

FEDERAL agents bring about the complication, catching up with the impetuous cattle thief before he and his son can set forth on a planned trip around the world. In prison, the Russian waits for his son to come and get him out—the man had rescued his own father from jail in the days of old Russia. The son finally comes—but thereby hangs the tale. Unfortunately the picture toward its finish loses much of its arrogant whimsicality and goes slightly sentimental. Suspense is good, however, and this descent from distinction does not keep the film from being good entertainment. Evidently some editing problems presented themselves at the very beginning of the picture. The synopsis on my press sheet hints of an episode in which the rustler's mode of operation is revealed, using an airplane to warn of the approach of the officers. Perhaps some of deletion could advantageously be put back. The present arrangement is rather summary and Mike's killing a man seems overemphasized. Fact is, I can't see that this killing

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adds anything to the story at all, especially since it was in self-defense.

Performances Are Outstanding . . .

SELDOM do I use the word "superb" with respect to a performance, but Akim Tamiroff is that in his portrayal of Mike. All the devices of the actor's art, including admirable use of make-up, he skilfully fuses into a characterization which is dynamic, funny, touching. Also contributing importantly to the success of the picture are Leif Erikson and Frances Farmer, both of whom, it will be recalled, sojourned on Broadway last season, vowing really to learn something about the actor's art, Hollywood affording insufficient instruction, in their opinion. Whatever the instructional opportunites of Hollywood may be, it is very evident that the two have learned a good deal in the interim. Erikson characterizes most effectively now, and he has increased his tools of expression twofold. And Frances Farmer plays with noticeably greater variation and emphasis. Another outstanding in the present cast is Lynne Overman, who plays a heavy and makes a capital job of it. Alfred E. Green has done imaginative work in his direction; is at his best, however, when the incidents are most brazen and bizarre. William C. Mellor's photography is first rate. The inventive story was by Ferdinand Rayher and John C. Moffitt. Its title you can figure out on the way home.

BOY REGENERATES RACKETEER . . .

 I AM A CRIMINAL; Monogram picture and release; director, William Nigh; producer, E. B. Derr; associate producer, Frank Melford; screen play by John W. Krafft; based on Harrison Jacobs' original story; photography, Paul Ivano; art director, Frank Dexter, Sr., film editor, Russell Schoengarth; recording, Karl Zint; musical director, Abe Meyer. Features John Collins. Supporting cast: Martin Spellman, Key Linaker, Lester Matthews, Craig Reynolds, Mary Kornman, May Beatty, Robert Fiske, Byron Foulger, Edward Earle, Jack Kennedy, Allan Cavan. Running time, 73 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ONE of the best Monogram has turned out. Treating with the recommendation ing with the regeneration of a racketeer through the affection he comes to hold for a small boy, whom he has adopted at the advice of his publicity agent as a means for winning public sympathy before a trial comes up, the story has moments of considerable poignancy. There is plenty of physical action, however, and the piece builds to a strong climax. John Carroll is a good actor and invests the part of the gangster with vigor and sincerity. His team-mate is little Martin Spellman, a talented youngster, who makes the most of his role of a street urchin, albeit the scriptists probably made him a shade too wise and toughened. Aside from the fact that precocity is difficult to make convincing, persons who are selfsufficient do not enlist our sympathy as readily as others. A competent cast of players are in support. Kay Linaker does well as the gangster's double-crossing girl friend, and Lester Matthews, May Beatty, and Robert Fiske are others who stand out. Mary Korman, quite grown up now, is pleasant as

the ingenue. William Nigh's direction is at its best in the scenes bordering on pathos, for which he has a particular bent. Seems to me these scenes would have benefited by a more liberal use of close-ups, however.

Shears Might Be Used ...

THE screen play by John W. Krafft, from an original by Harrison Jacobs, has logical development and Nigh has brought it to the screen with a satisfactory degree of smoothness. The opening scene, though, is rather talkative and too long, and it strikes me that there might be an advantage in eliminating this scene, everything considered. Carroll makes a much better entrance in the ensuing scene, too. Of course, we wouldn't know that the racketeer was an orphan and came from a poor neighborhood, but this information is not essential to the story. One would hardly imagine he had been educated in Switzerland. And as for the district attorney's also being an orphan, who cares? Viewed as a whole, the picture is good independent effort, and it should rate first-run showings in numerous quarters.

JONES CAST ENLARGED . . .

 EVERYBODY'S BABY; 20th-Fox production and release; director, Malcolm St. Clair; associate producer, John Stone; screen play by Karen De Wolf, Robert Chapin, Frances Hyland and Albert Ray; original story by Hilda Stone and Betty Reinhardt; based on characters created by Katharine Kavanaugh; photography, Edward Snyder; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Boris Leven; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Norman Colbert; costumes, Helen A. Myron; sound, Bernard Freericks and William K. Anderson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jed Prouty, Shirley Deane, Spring Byington, Russell Gleason, Ken Howell, George Ernest, June Carlson, Florence Roberts, Billy Mahan, Reginald Denny, Robert Allen, Claire Du Brey, Marvin Stephens, Hattie McDaniel, Arthur Loft, Howard Hickman. Running time, 61 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

BONNIE'S having a baby and her endeavor to rear it according to the precepts of a spurious child psychologist, one Dr. Pillcoff, provide the excitement for the Jones family in their current number. A sinister and scheming nurse is installed in the house, becomes a virtual dictator, refusing to let the infant be touched, demanding that the family don robes and place strips about their noses, as though entering an operating room, when they wish to see it. Some of the situations are very amusing, but on the whole the story material is at a disadvantage because the demands of the nurse obviously are absurd and we are not altogether convinced that the young wife would succumb to them, even taking into account the doctor's persuasive charm. Plot is rather thin and the authors seem to be working hard to supply humorous incidents. The yarn seems hard pressed for a climax too, and having the doctor jeered and pelted and tossed into the street by school boys when he comes to deliver a lecture, was scarcely an inspired one, either from the viewpoint of conviction or as an example of conduct for the many children who will see the picture. So it is that parts of the picture

December 10, 1938

seem forced, inhibiting the surges of laughter which have accompanied some of the earlier films. Fans of the family, however, will find their favorites as lively and companionable as always, and the story will suffice to entertain them.

Angel In Heaven Suggested . . .

Page Sixteen

MUCH of the action naturally is given over to Shirley Deane and Russell Gleason, both of whom rise to the occasion with comedy work surpassing that done in any of the earlier stories. Reginald Denny makes the most of the suave child analvst—all there is to be made, that is—and Claire Du Brey is very well cast as the grim nurse. Also featuring prominently in the proceedings is Florence Roberts, as Granny, and she gives just the right components of gentleness and ginger to the performance. Hattie McDaniel is very funny in this one, especially when at length she brandishes a candle stick at the intruding nurse. Spring Byington appears only briefly, but I never see her in this part without thinking of one of those medieval prints in which an angel is opening a window of heaven, looking benignly down. Though uncredited, the girl playing the part of Herbert's assistant at the florist shop revealed a flash of something which seemed worth somebody's paying attention to. Malcolm St. Clair has done a workmanlike job of direction. Production values are up to their usual standard, though the addition of background music, especially when the nervous young husband enters the hospital room of his wife, would have added much. The story, from inception to finish, was by six authors.

INSPIRED BY COMIC STRIP . . .

● LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE; Colonial production for Paramount release; director, Ben Holmes; producer, John Speaks; screen play by Budd Wilson Schulberg and Samuel Ornitz; story by Samuel Ornitz and Endre Bohem; strip character, Little Orphan Annie, as created by Harold Gray; photography, Frank Redman; art direction, Field Gray; film editor, Robert Bischoff; sound, Hal Bumbaugh; musical direction, Lou Forbes. Stars Ann Gillis. Supporting cast: Robert Kent, June Travis, J. Farrell MacDonald, J. M. Kerrigan, Sarah Padden, James Burke, Ian MacLaren, Margaret Armstrong, Dorothy Vaughn, Ben Weldon. Running time, 57 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

SIMPLE fare, but told with a certain effectiveness. Chief merit of the picture is a rather vivid picturization of the underprivileged class of New York's East Side. The outlook of these people, their problems and environment, are quite successfully realized, set forth with humor and sometimes starkness. Largely responsible for this element in the picture is the direction of Ben Holmes, who has handled his material with sure-handedness and not a little imagination. Numerous of the smaller parts are well characterized. The yarn is based upon the Little Orphan Annie character of the comic strip created by Harold Gray, and has to do with the child's prevailing upon the debt-ridden East Siders to pool their resources and back a young prize fighter. On the night of the momentous fight the boy and Annie

are locked into a room of the training quarters by henchmen of a loan shark. The climax, in which an army of irate women descend on the gymnasium and beat up on the gangsters, is plenty hoked up and probably too long, but it supplies a fair punch and those who are not too critical will get some laughs out of it. At that, it is original not to have the suspense hang upon the big fight itself.

Has Music and Montage . . .

ITTLE Ann Gillis makes a credible Orphan An-Lnie, though she revealed signs of nervousness now and then; and if that spontaneous gasp of laughter is borrowed from Jane Withers, she should give it back. It is a taxing part, however, and the child plays with general competence. As the young fighter, Robert Kent performs with more vigor and technical variety than I have noticed in any of his earlier renditions. June Travis does not have a demanding part, but she might have characterized more. She is merely pleasant and efficient. Firm characterization is done by J. Farrell MacDonald, J. M. Kerrigan, and the always outstanding Sarah Padden. Ian Mac-Laren gives an effective stock portrayal of a Chinaman. Several others of the cast do comparable work. A good feature of the production is the frequent use of background music to heighten scenes, well scored by Lou Forbes, and there is further embellishment in the way of montage, ably filmed by Frank Redman. The screen play was by Budd Schulberg and Samuel Ornitz, from an original by the latter and Endre Bohem. Colonial Pictures produced it for Paramount release. Exhibitors will find it a satisfactory programer, with special advantages for kid matinees.

SUPERIOR WESTERN . . .

● COME ON RANGERS: Republic production and release; directed by Joe Kane; associate producer, Charles E. Ford; original screen play by Gerald Geraghty and Jack Natteford; production manager, Al Wilson; photographed by Jack Marta; film editor, Edward Mann; musical director, Cy Feuer. Features Roy Rogers and Mary Hart. Supporting cast: Raymond Hatton, J. Farrell MacDonald, Purnell Pratt, Harry Woods, Bruce MacFarlane, Lane Chandler, Chester Gunnels, Lee Powell. Running time, 56 minutes.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

TOME ON, RANGERS has more cinematic force to it than a half dozen of the latest drawing room comedies it has been my fate to see within recent weeks. Those who scoff at these horse operas with their never-changing plots, should visit this third edition of Roy Rogers to see a motion picture in motion. Fortunately, Associate Producer Charles E. Ford has not tried to impede his story with any plot twists and climactic hijinks. Rangers is a straight-forward action narrative that has been told many times before. But what is fresh is Joe Kane's able direction and a number of really breath-taking shots of western terrain, the work of Cameraman Jack Marta. Director Kane deserves a solid round of applause, too, for improving the acting quality of Roy's performance. The boy is improving, gives his

lines shades and meaning that spell the difference between acting and reading.

Hatton a Standout . . .

N OLD and welcome face was Raymond Hatton's. AI have not seen him on the screen for many moons. A recent revival of Hunchback of Notre Dame brought him back again. He was a good actor then, and has not lost the knack yet. Hatton does more acting without reciting a line than a dozen stage Hamlets. Now such a performance, and it was a good one in Rangers, evokes praise because it lifts the production above the general run of shoot-'em-up Westerns. J. Farrell MacDonald turns in a fine performance, too, as the fort commander in this story of Texas law and the Rangers. Mary Hart seems to be coming along in good style. I would like to see her in a real dramatic role; chances are she could handle them. Purnell Pratt is always good, and Harry Woods as his partner in crime also turned in a good performance.

Technically Sharp . . .

SIDE from what appeared to be an occasional ana-Achronism in costume, Associate Producer Ford has given his picture ample production values. Certainly action was not one of the economies. Film Editor Ed Mann had a lot of good material to work with and whipped together a good, well-paced picture. Gerald Geraghty and Jack Natteford's yarn is punched with a good, plausible plot, good dialogue. Edward Cherkose, I believe, wrote some of the music. One dissenting note: I thought I recognized some of Cy Feur's background music which I have heard in previous pictures. Roy scores in his third picture, with promise of better things to come.

SEATTLE EDITOR WRITES

VARIOUS ills from which the film industry is suffering have been discussed by the Spectator for years, but it is seldom mention of them is found in the lay press. A Seattle subscriber to the Spectator sends us a clipping from the Seattle Star which makes interesting reading. It is in the form of an open letter to Will Hays, whom it terms, "The Boss of the Films." Under the heading, If Movies Are Sick, Blame the Producers—and Broadcasting!, the Star has this to say:

DEAR Mr. Hays:
The Seattle Star would like to call to your attention an evil that is fast building opposition to the moving picture industry and that we believe, if allowed to continue, has a good chance of wrecking it completely.

We refer to the widespread use of movie stars on radio programs and the increasing custom of broadcasting the highlights, gags and "punch lines" of new movies over the air before they are shown in the the-

The extent of the opposition of moviegoers to this was not recognized by us until a few weeks ago. Recently, in connection with other newspapers of the country, the Star has been attempting to stimulate interest among theatre-goers in the \$250,000 prize contest of the movie industry.

Scarcely had this campaign got under way when the complaints began to come in by letter and phone -complaints that the pictures the public was being urged to see were old; that the plots had been used in condensed radio versions; that the public was tired of the stars from having heard them so often over the

We paid no particular attention at the time. But the kicks continued to come in. When the number of protests had passed the 200 mark we decided we owed it to our friends in the industry to pass the word along and give the movies the opportunity to at least recognize and perhaps correct a bad situation.

Hence this letter.

A checkup with movie exhibitors in this territory showed that, in their opinion, and from their books, many of the film stars who once were close to the top in pulling power had become "flops" from a boxoffice standpoint. And the exhibitors were unanimous in laying the blame to the fact that these stars have been heard so often on the air that their onetime fans were tired of them.

The fault, in our opinion, does not lie with the stars themselves. It lies with producers who, eager to "ballyhoo" their coming pictures, encourage the use of their stars and the punch lines of their plots over the air in advance of the picture premiere. In many cases the studios have opened their own radio departments to encourage the use of their stars on air programs. In at least one case the studio itself is broadcasting its own programs, with its own stars.

What chance has a movie exhibitor to get a patron to come downtown in the evening and pay an admission price to see ONE movie star on the screen when, if he stays at home, he can hear a DOZEN, in the flesh, at no cost?

While we are protesting, let us register an objection also to the trailers used by the theatres themselves to advertise the following week's show. At present they show so many yof the punch scenes of the film that the picture is robbed of most of its interest for the patrons who pay their money to see it in its entirety.

Why not a return to the old-fashioned idea of introducing merely the stars and the characters they play? Save the thrills for the cash customers.

Perhaps, Mr. Hays, we are sticking out our neck where it doesn't belong. But the newspapers and the

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movies have been long-time friends. If we saw any other friend attempting to commit suicide, we would do everything we could to prevent it.

And that's what the movies are doing, just as sure-

ly as if they were using cyanide or a gun.

—THE SEATTLE STAR.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD

of

MABEL KEEFER

THE marked excellence of many pictures coming out of Hollywood of late is doing much to convince us that motion pictures really may become our best entertainment. For that reason one reflects pensively on the fact that one million dollars is being poured into the hopper just to tell us so. It is a case of, "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." In other words the pictures are claiming our attention to such an extent that we do not hear the million dollars.

THORNTON DELEHANTY, writing of the indelible mark left by the French director, Duvivier, on The Great Waltz, even though it was virtually remade after he finished with it, says: "Duvivier proved one great virtue in the camera: like music it can talk to you in any language." I seem to have read something like that before. It was, I think, something written by a man named Beaton.

THE film industry certifies,
That according to its notion,
Our best entertainment lies
In pictures that have motion.
But I am told by certain spies,
That recent films are proving
That our best entertainment lies
In pictures that are moving.

CIMABUE, according to Hendrik Willem van Loon, was a painter whom the Florentines honored as the father of Italian painting, and whose chief claim to fame seems to have rested upon the fact that he was supposed to have painted the "biggest picture in the world." Goodness! Is the idea back of "colossal," "stupendous," and "gigantic" as old as that?

AS AN example of pure artistry, I recommend the scene in Four Daughters where John Garfield sits at the piano working over the music Jeffery Lynn has written. The excellence and originality of the music, and the way John Garfield projects the personality of Mickey Borden out from the screen and under the skin of the theatre audience, make it something to be

remembered for a long time. . . . And there is something else—meticulous directing.

LACK of meticulous directing spoiled a musical short that I saw recently. It was based upon gypsy music—fine music. The voices in the cast were excellent, and there was a solo violin that brought out all the poignancy inherent in gypsy music. With eyes closed, one pictured dark forests, brightly burning camp fires, and gypsies singing and dancing with unconscious grace. But with eyes open, looking at the screen, one saw something quite different. The action moved stodgily; the actors were stilted and self-conscious. Even the scenery was self-conscious. There is no excuse for such carelessness and lack of imagination. I say this more in anger than in sorrow.

LISTENING to Nelson Eddy on the Chase & San-born hour, going to town with Rimsky-Korsa-kov's The Prophet, I am moved to wonder why MGM doesn't do right by our Nelson, and let him do a musical short composed entirely of Russian music, supported by the Don Cossacks. I may be wrong, but something like that would seem to be more to the point than having him sock Victor Mc-Laglen, as it is said he is to do in a future picture.

 $m{B}^{AD}$ will be the day for every man when he becomes absolutely contented with the life he is living, with the thoughts he is thinking, with the deeds he is doing; when there is not forever beating at the doors of his soul some great desire to do something larger.—Phillips Brooks. Read, then, this prizewinning letter printed in Photoplay, which knocks the argument that motion pictures do not teach or preach, into a cocked hat-worse than that, into one of the new style hats women are wearing. The letter is written by a legless man who sells pencils and needles. A neighbor sees that he goes to the movies twice a week. He writes: "The movies have given me not only consolation, laughter, romance and knowledge, but they have taught me to be brave, to have faith and courage, that with courage all things are possible. . . . And so, when I leave the theatre, it is with a stirring of ambition, a yearning to do something yet, and a feeling that I can if I will." And there you have it! Those motion picture executives who "do not envision themselves as

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teachers . . . preachers . . . " cannot do a thing about it. Their pictures do teach and they do preach. . . . Another prize-winning letter has to do with Holiday. The writer says: ". . . It uncovers one of the evils of American living, the insane desire for more and more money." Ha! more teaching and preaching, and yet, at one and the same time—grand entertainment!

ANENT If I Were King: Subscribing to all the encomium that have been heaped on this splendid picture, I would add a comment or two. To me, one outstanding bit was the dying girl (Ellen Drew, was it?) barely breathing the name, "Francois," and yet it was heard distinctly, as was Ronald Colman's answering whisper. My other comment is one that has not been made in any of the reviews I have read, but I have an idea the reviewers will all subscribe to it—Joel McCrea is a lucky man.

THERE be times when I am in a motion picture theatre, that these words of Henry Austin Dobson come into my mind:

Ye Gods! how he talked!
What a torrent of sound,
His hearers invaded, encompassed
And—drowned!

BEFORE: Why girls should fall in love, I must confess I do not see! That they should is quite incomprehensible to me. They get in such a flurry; and such a state of worry—I really do not understand how such a thing can be! . . . No woman should allow herself to fall in love, and think she wants to play the part of a turtledove; she should show her independence of the masculine sex and be rid of many worries that now perplex. I do not see how anyone who has an ounce of pride, can show such marked anxiety to be a blushing bride; and put the smile of some mere man all else above—no woman should allow herself to fall in love!

READER'S DIGEST contains an article condensed from The Atlantic Monthly, written by Howard Mumford Jones. It is entitled Relief from Murder, and is headed, "A book reviewer rebels against the horrors of modern fiction." After citing the subjects dealt with in several books that he has been called upon to review, and emphasizing the fact that he does not believe in censorship, Mr. Jones says: "Nev-



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ertheless, I am bored by these novels. I have had my fill of general hellishness. I long to be introduced to a cultured human being in a story, to enter an ordinary home, to read some merely civilized conversation." There is meat for the film industry in those statements, in spite of the fact that most of the subjects dealt with in the books under discussion would not be presented on the screen. Mr. Jones goes on to say: "The pride of the hard-boiled school is that it is realistic. We do not care, say these novelists in effect, whether you like our picture of life or not, but this is existence as we find it. As honest artists we are portraying the real life of America-..." To this, Mr. Jones says, "Bosh!" and I should like to add, "Pish, tush, and nonsense!" Some months ago, in a "Cinematic Soliloquy," I said: "Why is it, I wonder, that when someone pleads for more "realism" in plays and on the screen, he seems always to mean something disagreeable — something fraught with bitterness, fear and hate? Pleasant, even joyful things happen in real life and why is not that realism? . . ." Mr. Jones also points out that, while we smile at the absurdities upon which 18th century writers depended for their effects, inspection proves that modern novelists are using the same ingredients. Which fact upholds my contention that the world is too old-fashioned. Most of the things that we do to prove that we are up-to-date and sophisticated, show that, as a matter of fact, we are away behind the times and merely doing things that people have been doing for hundreds of years, instead of having progressed to something better.

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ness for the Spectator by contributing to the size of this issue, my grateful thanks. In addition to the material significance of the generous amount of advertising, there is the added expression of approval of the editorial standard which the publication made its own with its first issue nearly thirteen years ago, and since has maintained in principle and has endeavored to maintain in quality.

To all Spectator readers, my Christmas greetings. May your minds be at ease, your stockings well filled, your tables beautifully supplied. And will you tell the children that Mr. and Mrs. Spectator hope Santa Claus managed to get his pack down all their chimneys? And will you pat your dogs on the head for us?

THE MOON AND SIXPENCE . . .

DECENTLY in Los Angeles Times Edwin Shal-A lert discussed at length what he termed the "desperate" search for acting talent being made by all the major studios. I quote one paragraph: "Where will we find real actors for the films today? . . . A major issue at all times, this has become a more menacing question. Hollywood seems to take the life out of personalities as never before. It is a fearful job to find new talent, it is more fearful to build that talent up after it has been discovered. Too often is a first picture the best for a find. Diminuendo after that!" England has an old saying to describe an impractical man—that he is so busy looking at the moon, he overlooks the sixpence at his feet. The film industry always is looking for talent in the moon while there is plenty of it at its feet. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a shortage of available talent right here in Hollywood. In fact, there is too much to go around. It can be spotted in almost every picture one sees, bits well done, some flash of genius by a member of a mob, perhaps a smile or a frown—just enough to suggest a possibility of development, and certainly more promising than some beauty contest winner who never faced a motion picture camera.

Before the hopelessness of it dampened my ardor as a discoverer—hopeless because no producer paid any attention to my predictions—I made a practice of ascertaining the names of bit players who had attracted my attention, and giving the names publicity in the Spectator.

Where to Look for Stars . . .

 $m{U}^{NDOUBTEDLY}$ some of those to whose names I drew attention would not have risen to star stature even if they had been given a chance. They may have lacked the determination to succeed, which always is essential to success, or they may have been developed along the wrong lines. I never claimed that any of them would become stars, only going so far as to say they showed sufficient personality plus ability to justify consideration as potential stars. In the cases of Bette Davis, Myrna Loy, Jean Arthur, Loretta Young and some others, my guesses proved good ones. Of course, I mention only those whose names I was the first to mention in print, and those I have mentioned are enough to support my contention that the place to look for screen talent is on the screen. Having talent scouts turning their backs on Hollywood and dashing hither and yon on this and other continents, with their eyes peeled for future stars, is the height of absurdity, so much so, it would be recognized as such if the film industry did not indulge in so many other practices equally absurd. I wrote a correct guess about Deanna Durbin after hearing her sing and having a talk with her, and before she had appeared on the screen. She had been on the Metro lot for months and no one there could see anything in her. She was the sixpence at Metro's feet while it was looking at the moon.

Hollywood's Gaze on the Moon . . .

DIFFICULTY in finding stars is a fundamental weakness of Hollywood's way of doing things. The greatest folly it has committed has been its im-

REVIEWS

Kentucky... Sweethearts... Christmas Carol... Heart of the North... Dawn Patrol... Charlie Chan at Honolulu... Duke of West Point... Smiling Along... Comet Over Broadway... Swing, Sister, Swing... Going Places... Paris Honeymoon... Next Time I Marry... There's That Woman Again... Tom Sawyer, Detective.

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Keep on punching, welford

DUDLEY NICHOLS Member, SWG. portation of stage players to act in pictures. The screen is not an acting art, but that is a postulate you will find developed in one of the articles on film fundamentals now appearing in the Spectator, so I will not go into it here. There is no reason why players cannot come from the stage, just as there is no reason why they cannot come from the ranks of football players, bricklayers or college professors, but the thing which matters after they get to Hollywood is how they adapt themselves to the exclusive requirements of the screen and forget the technique they employed in their previous occupations. Writing for the stage is the worst possible training for writing for the screen, just as stage acting is bad for the screen. These are truths Hollywood some day will learn; that they are truths is now being demonstrated by film theatre box-offices which, government figures reveal, touched a new low in October. Hollywood producers would get farther if they called in their talent scouts and kept their eyes on their screens. Of course, to know what they saw there, they would have to learn what a motion picture is, and I am afraid that is knowledge their self-complacency will not permit them to acquire. They love to look at the moon.

SCOTCHING EVIL RUMORS . . .

IIIE PAY little attention to personal gossip which so fills the Hollywood air, but there are two reports now current which are far from the truth and we feel it our duty to correct them: a) Sam Goldwyn has not bought another Roosevelt; b) Sam did not lose Jimmie in a poker game. Sam held four sevens, and the producer who called with two stars and raised him one finished script and nine supervisors, had a king-full.

ACADEMY TO STUDY TELEVISION . . .

WISE move on the part of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to appoint a permanent committee on television to study this recent scientific development with a view to determining where, how, and why there is relationship between television and motion pictures. In the ranks of the Academy there are many able scientists and there will be no difficulty in forming a committee which soon should be able to tell us all there is to know about the new device that might develope into a strong competitor for the established purveyors of screen entertainment. There is one point about the new Academy activity which puzzles me. If we are to determine the points of contact between A and B, the effect of one upon the other, we must know as much about the fundamentals of B as we do of those of A. To study one and not the other would lead to no conclusions we, with confidence, could accept as final. It is heartening to read of the Academy's proposed study of television; it would be still more heartening to read that at long last it was going to study the screen as an art. Already the Academy has to its credit distinguished service to motion picture sciences, but I can recall

nothing it has done for the motion picture itself as a medium of entertainment.

Why Not Study the Screen? . . .

WHY are film box-office receipts continuing to decline while general business conditions continue to improve? Has the Academy a committee whose purpose is to find an answer to that question? It would be more to the point to investigate conditions which are affecting the film industry today than to investigate something which cannot affect it before tomorrow. But there is no reason why the two jobs cannot run concurrently. The Spectator for years has warned the industry of the inevitable financial effect of its lack of knowledge of the fundamentals of its business; and the fact that the predicted effect is now being felt would seem to lend credence to our analysis of the cause upon which the prediction was based. If the Spectator so long in advance could chart the course film finances since have taken, why did the Academy devote no thought to it? The Spectator, by itself, cannot pound sense into production heads. For more than a decade it has been trying to do so. Perhaps the Academy could accomplish something by a mass attack. There is nothing mysterious about the ailment box-offices are suffering. However, we so often have diagnosed the case, put our finger on the symptoms and suggested the cure, we now will spare our readers a repetition of it. But for a course of reading, we suggest the series of special articles we now are publishing (see page 37).

HAS THE WRONG EFFECT . . .

ONE of the strongest reasons the public has for patronizing a film theatre is curiosity as to what the picture is about. In a large measure this curiosity is satisfied by radio programs which include scenes from pictures on the point of being released. Its only effect must be harmful to the box-office, exhibitors continually protest against it, but it goes blithely on, Hollywood regarding it as effective publicity. It is effective, but its effect is to keep people away from picture houses.

PARABLE OF PURSE MAKER . . .

ONCE upon a time a Motion Picture Producer went to a Maker of Purses and said, "I want you to make for me a silk purse out of a sow's ear." "It cannot be done," replied the Maker of Purses. "A silk purse must be made out of silk, but perhaps I can use some bristles from a sow's ear to decorate it.' "But I make motion pictures without motion," pro-"I use dialogue instead of motested the Producer. tion, so why can't you make silk purses out of sows' ears?" "What if I could?" was the answer. "Do you want me to spend one million dollars trying to make the public believe they are silk purses? Look what has happened to your business. Why do you not make your motion pictures out of motion and use a little bristling dialogue to decorate them?" And the Producer saw a great light; he took the ad-

vice of the Maker of Purses and soon was able to put in another swimming pool and establish a second racing stable.

BILL WILL BE TOLD HOW . . .

DAPERS tell us that as production head of Paramount, William LeBaron, "will have working with him Frank Freeman, who is in charge of Paramount theatres, is familiar with theatre-owners' problems and will act as contact man for exhibitors." I feel sorry for Bill if Freeman functions as the papers say he will. It is tough enough for a producer to withstand the voluntary, unofficial interference and advice which are his lot, but to have permanently at his elbow a man who is there for the sole purpose of telling him how exhibitors would like pictures to be made, is quite enough to drive him nutty. Pictures are so close to all of us each of us thinks he knows how to make them. I know precisely how to turn out box-office winners; you know the same thing; so do the corner druggist and the policeman; but the trouble is that we do not think alike, and if a producer tried to follow all our directions, tried to please all of us, he would spend his rapidly declining years in a strait-jacket. The only way for Bill LeBaron to make a picture is to make it as he sees it, and he will come nearer hitting the box-office bull's-eye than he can by taking the advice of anyone who never made one.

NEVER TOO LATE TO SEND . . .

NOT too late to get a batch of the Christmas Seals. N As a matter of fact, it never is too late. The revenue from the sale of the seals is devoted to a twelve-month war on tuberculosis, and if you overlooked purchasing any, your check would serve the same purpose if it were dated New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, or any of the days in between.

WRITERS LACK PICTURE TRAINING . . .

VERDOSE of dialogue is what ails the screen. U Even the stupidest production executives are beginning to realize it. If the public preferred oral entertainment to visual entertainment, there would be no crowds at football games on Saturday afternoons. The fans could stay at home and listen to a radio description of the game each is interested in. One can quite understand the tardiness of the executives in realizing that elemental fact. Racing stables and betting on races must not be sidetracked. But the inevitable failure of the million dollar idiocy to do the box-office any permanent good is going to cause some serious thinking in production circles; and not until the thinking leads to the conclusion that dialogue in pictures must be reduced to an absolute minimum will the film industry as a whole begin to get sturdy financial legs under it. A difficulty it will face is that the writers who are turning out its scripts at present are trained only in expressing themselves in words and have little knowledge of the demands

of a visual medium. They have come to Hollywood from literature and the stage and have not been encouraged to learn how to write in the language of the medium in which their work is to be presented to the public.

Should Be Easier to Take . . .

ONLY the other day I read in the papers that a prominent author whose latest book is proving a success, is being brought to Hollywood to adapt it to the screen. Without a day's training in writing for the screen, this man is going to be paid thousands of dollars for trying his hand at it, while scores of skilled screen writers already here are vainly looking for jobs. And to remedy the damage done by such brainless production methods, the producers are spending one million dollars in an effort to stupify the public into the belief that Hollywood knows how to make pictures that will constitute its best entertain. ment. There is something pathetic in the spectacle. And yet as I have said many times, a true motion picture is the easiest art creation to make, the eye and the imagination much simpler mediums to write for than the ear and the intellect. Even the overdose of dialogue we are getting now could be made easier to take and more readily digestible if ordinary intelligence were used in the manner of its presentation. One hundred words spoken too loudly cause more unfavorable audience reaction than five hundred words spoken in natural conversational tones. If we must have dialogue, it should be made as easy as possible to take.

Eye and Ear of Audience . . .

NE thing directors always should remember is that the camera is both the eye and the ear of every individual in the audience; it brings the speaker as near to the man in the back row as it does to the man in the front row. I know nothing about the technique of sound recording, but it occurs to me that one reason for the excessively loud dialogue may be that the microphone always is hung as near as possible to the speaker, irrespective of the distance he is from the camera. If the microphone demands no such pampering, it should be hung on the camera and dialogue should be delivered only to reach it distinctly. That would mean that it would come to each person in the audience just as distinctly, thereby giving the scene the touch of intimacy it should have. Something else directors should give more thought to is the grouping of players when they are reading lines. In some picture I have seen recently there is a scene in a club lounge—men in easy chairs reading, a couple in the background playing chess an atmosphere of restful quiet. But in the foreground two of the leading characters are standing up stiffly, speaking their dialogue loudly enough for everyone in the room to overhear, although the camera does not show that even one of the extras is aware of the disturbing conversation. The nature of the conversation was such that the two players would have seated themselves as comfortably as the other members of the club were seated, and would have addressed each other as quietly as the intimate nature of the conversation demanded and good taste would have dictated. In this instance, it is not the amount of dialogue that would irritate an audience; it is the irritating way in which it is presented. I cannot recall the name of the picture or who directed it. Perhaps it is just as well.

AMONG CINEMATIC MEMORIES . . .

Some screen memories linger a long time. Among mine is a performance by Russell Simpson in a picture I saw at least a dozen years ago—Wild Geese. I have forgotten who made it and who else was in it, but the great characterization by that skilled actor is still fresh in my mind. I see him on the screen only occasionally now, which is a sad commentary on the judgment of producers and their lack of loyalty to those who have made valuable contributions to the screen.

SAM AND HIS JIMMIE . . .

OUR remarks in the last Spectator about Sam Goldwyn's capture of Jimmie Roosevelt stirred one reader into penning a letter in which he takes me to task for what he terms, "casting a slur on a member of a family which should always be referred to in only the most respectful terms." When Jimmie gets into pictures only because he is a member of the President's family, it is difficult to comment upon his entry without bringing his family into it. The son of a President of the United States taking the hero role in an exploitation stunt, gets its publicity values solely from the family connection. No one accuses the young man of knowing anything whatever about the motion picture business, consequently he has nothing except his name to sell Sam. And Sam is a wise buyer. Already he has received publicity worth more to his pictures than the amount of the first year's salary. Then there is an extra dividend in the form of gratification to either Sam's vanity or his sense of humor; I am not sure which. Certainly there is a comedy in the whole thing, but it is rather sad comedy. However, it will not last long. Jimmie is not the kind to stay put, and Sam is not the kind to keep on paying out money when he is getting nothing in return for it. As a publicity stunt the incident is about over already. There is one charge which cannot be brought against Jimmie -that he is taking a job away from an experienced man. The job of being a President's son can be filled only by a son of a President, consequently only Jimmie's brothers have reason to squawk about his getting it.

PAGING COLUMBIA'S COHN . . .

ANOTHER New York play director is being brought to Hollywood to do a picture. He is Peter Godfrey, whose latest success on Broadway was Shadow and Substance, in which a Hollywood girl, Julie Hayden, whom our film producers could not see, has made a great hit. Columbia has imported

Godfrey. I know what I am going to suggest is revolutionary, but as I have a reputation, anyway, for taking wild flights of fancy, I cannot lose anything by suggesting to Harry Cohn that as he is in the business of producing pictures, not plays, it might be good business for him to entrust his pictures to people whose latest successes were scored in Hollywood, not on Broadway.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

LTHOUGH I have lived in Southern California A for nearly a score of years, I still get a kick out of sitting outdoors in December while I do my writing job. At the moment that is what I am doing, but there is no saying what the weather will be like when this reaches you. . . . Newsreels reveal President Roosevelt as a nifty turkey carver; rather fancy my own skill at the same art, and if Franklin would like to make a contest of it, I'm game. . . . Nice of the San Francisco Fair people to celebrate the second birthday of Freddie, the Spaniel, by opening their big show. . . . While chatting with Charlie Chaplin the other day, he reminded me that at a dance at the Coronado Hotel some years ago, I introduced him to the Mrs. Spencer who is now the Duchess of Windsor. . . . Percy, our he cat, stretches to his full length when he sleeps; measures thirty-three inches from tip of tail to nose. . . . Customer writes to ask me how-come I mowed the lawn in late November, as mentioned in this column; said the grass was dormant now. Lawn was covered with fallen leaves: I mowed it to cut up the leaves which I left lying on the lawn to serve as fertilizer. Seems to me like a good idea, though I have not heard of its being tried before. Will issue supplementary report next spring. .. For years my only shaving cream has been Barbasol. . . . Before we leave for an evening preview, we try to make sure there is no wastepaper basket Freddie can reach during our absence; when we forget, he carries all the paper into the living room and tears it into small pieces. . . . Have reduced our duck family by two, having given Manchester and George to the Robert Watsons who have promised they will not eat them. Now Mrs. Bromleigh and Sophie have joint interest in a bigamous husband in the person of Mr. Stuyvesant instead of sharing three husbands, the harlots! . . . I carry very few things in my pockets; have nine pockets in the coat and vest I am wearing, and only one of them has anything in it. . . . Mrs. Spectator knitted the Pekinese a sweater, but when it is put on her, Bo Peep stands perfectly still, refuses to move while wearing it; apparently objects to being made a sissy. . . . All the turbulent foreign news I want I can get out of the headlines; refuse to read any more, and switch to something else when it starts to come by radio. In his daily activities one stumbles over enough nearat-hand grief, and I do not see what good it does him to import more from abroad. But I could go in a big way for a rousing motion picture made to prove that war is murder and does not settle anything.



Merry Christmas to the Spectator



Una Merkel



My compliments and
best Christmas wishes

JANET BEECHER





'Taint pictures nor polo

Nor throwing the bolo

Nor singing nor dancing nor living,

Nor even the fellow

Who sells all that jello,

Your best entertainment is giving!





ANNE SHIRLEY
Wishes The Spectator
A Merry Christmas

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

IT TRULY IS A HONEY . . .

● A CHRISTMAS CAROL: MGM; producer, Joseph L. Mankiewicz; director, Edwin L. Marin; screen play, Hugo Butler; musical score, Franz Waxman; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art director, John Detlie; set decorations, Edwin B. Willis; costumes, Valles; character makeup, Jack Dawn; photographer, Sidney Wagner; film editor, George Boemler. Cast: Reginald Owen, Gene Lockhart, Kathleen Lockhart, Terry Kilburn, Barry Mackay, Lynne Carver, Leo G. Carroll, Lionel Braham, Ann Rutherford, D'Arcy Corrigan, Ronald Sinclair. Running time, 69 minutes.

WHEN the preview was over, one of the bright young men in Metro's publicity department asked me if I did not think A Christmas Carol is a honey of a picture. I assured him that in my opinion it certainly is a honey. And a moment later I told L. B. Mayer and Sam Katz that it is a honey and that it should be shown in all the theatres in the English-speaking world every December. L. B. told me he thought it would be successful if shown after Christmas, as it is impossible now to give it circulation of any wide extent before Santa Claus descends the 1938 chimneys. If it were my picture, I would hold it until next fall, except in the cases of the few houses which may have shown it by this time, and then distribute as many prints as it is practical for simultaneous showing when the world again is in an ante-Christmas frame of mind. The film version of A Christmas Carol is more than a motion picture; it is — or could become — an institution. London's Christmas Pantomime is an institution which goes on endlessly, the same thing year after year, the boy of a couple of generations ago taking his grandson to see it this year. And the Dickens story of Old Scrooge, Tiny Tim, the Cratchits and the rest of them, is as deathless, is served fresh each year on the Christmas Eves of many millions of people.

Dickens Ghost Lives On . . .

ICKENS'S own conception of his Christmas clas-**U** sic is that it was "an attempt to raise the ghost of an idea." He achieved a ghost which refuses to be exorcised. It is an idea which finds lodgment in the hearts of the world, a more permanent resting place than the minds of the world, for our mental processes are affected by changing material considerations, while our emotions remain truly elemental and not playthings of our shifting intellectual excursions. It is the heart of the Dickens immortal classic which Metro has captured, a heart our intellects would scorn if we allowed them to function while we view the screen. Only hokum do we see there, but touching hokum, a season's heartbeats, an emotional sermon whose text is human kindness, preached in a pulpit which is old London but whose message is as modern as tomorrow, with none of its newness worn thin by generations of repetition. Cedric Gibbons and John Detlie have recreated Threadneedle Street of a century ago, and Sidney Wagner's camera transforms

the creation into a series of striking Christmas cards against which the heart-warming tale is told.

Owen, Lockhart, Outstanding . . .

VOUR imagination will be stirred by the heartlessness of Old Scrooge, your love will be earned by Tiny Tim and your sympathy by Bob Cratchit and his sprightly family. You will be the victim of the contagion of Fred's cheerfulness and the sweetness of Bess, the girl he loves and who loves him. You will be chilled by the sorrows which beset the beginning and warmed by the happiness which adorns the ending-hokum, yes, but delicious, inspired and wholesome hokum. Reginald Owen proves a wise choice for the role of Old Scrooge. His performance is a beautiful one, one of rare understanding which developes fully the possibilities of the part. Gene Lockhart as Bob Cratchit, gives us one of the finest, most perfectly shaded and illuminating characterizations of his distinguished acting career. Kathleen Lockhart, his wife in real life, is admirable as his screen wife and again proves herself the capable actress. Terry Kilburn will warm your heart with his appealing Tiny Tim. For one so young his characterization is amazing. Barry Mackay and Lynne Carver, as the sweethearts, display marked ability. Young Mackay should prove a box-office winner as a leading man. One ghost (Leo Carroll) and three spirits, those of Christmas Present, Past, Future, are interpreted skilfully and sympathetically by Lionel Braham, Ann Rutherford and D'Arcy Corrigan. Ronald Sinclair, as Young Scrooge, capably rounds out the named

Marin's Direction Brilliant . . .

WARMEST praise is due Hugo Butler for the understanding and sympathy displayed in his translation in screen terms of the Dickens classic. It was no easy task to capture the values of the original material to make possible their bringing to life so tellingly on the screen, but Butler proves himself capable of it. His screen play was put into safe hands when given to Edwin Marin to direct. Again it was no easy task for a young American to capture the atmosphere and flavor of crowded London of a century ago and today impress us with the authenticity which makes us believe it. That is what Marin does; he takes us back a century and makes us feel we are contemporaries of those to whom he introduces us, makes us laugh with them, cry with them, leading logically to the happy ending which sends us from the picture theatre feeling a little cleaner than when we went in, more friendly with those who crowd the exits with us, and more assured that in spite of turmoil and strife, wars and rumors of war; in spite of the Hitlers and the Mussolinis and all the international crimes, all's well with the world in the long run, that the spirits of the past, present, and future still rule the universe and inevitably will catch up with

all the Old Scrooges which now afflict it so sorely. As screen entertainment, A Christmas Carol truly is a honey. As a moral lesson it is a masterpiece. For weaving together so skilfully and compassionately all the elements composing it, Edwin Marin is due a special award of merit.

Music In Dickens's Manner . . .

By Bruno David Ussher

TONGRATULATIONS to MGM and Franz Waxman whose score for a Christmas Carol appealed greatly to everyone I spoke to that evening following a press preview. I have referred to Waxman's natural and ingenious scoring on various occasions. Christmas Carol offered considerable opportunities, but these had their difficulties. It is not only more difficult to write music for a widely known story, but the task is all the more demanding when the story is one of the genuine naivety of this Dickens tale. Waxman has caught the atmosphere of the Yuletide as of England of a century ago. The use of traditional tunes is quite to the point. I was much impressed with his background sequences for the ghost scenes. Here a composer and his arrangerorchestrators had to avoid effects which would be disturbing rather than eerie. The mood of the supernatural had to be made more convincing than the screen alone could accomplish. At the same time the music had to keep psychological pace with the dramatic growth of the story. The lesson taught Scrooge, as the future is unfolded to him, becomes more and more pressing. Choice of orchestration in the churchyard and during the morning service was particularly good. The change and conversion of Scrooge was convincingly handled so that the score constitutes a fine example of the dramatic supplementation supplied by the right type and quantity of music. A few slow cues matter little.

ITS KINGDOM IS A HORSE . . .

● KENTUCKY; 20th-Fox; associate producer, Gene Markey; director, David Butler; screen play, Lamar Trotti and John Taintor Foote; from the story, "The Look of Eagles," by John Taintor Foote; technicolor photography, Ray Rennahan; technicolor director, Natalie Kalmus; associate technicolor director, Henri Jaffa; photography, Ernest Palmer; art director, Henri Jaffa; photography, Ernest Palmer; art director, Bernard Herzbrun and Lewis Creber; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Irene Morra; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical director, Louis Silvers. Cast: Loretta Young, Richard Greene, Walter Brennan, Douglas Dumbrille, Karen Morley, Moroni Olsen, Russell Hicks, Willard Robertson, Charles Waldron, George Reed, Bobs Watson, Delmar Watson, Leona Roberts, Charles Lane, Charles Middleton, Harry Hayden, Robert Middlemass, Madame Sul-Te-Wan, Cliff Clark, Meredith Howard, Fred Burton, Charles Trowbridge, Eddie Anderson, Stanley Andrews, Running time, 95 minutes.

A RACEHORSE story with one great horse race in it; colored portraits of horses so beautiful they will stir you emotionally; an epic of Kentucky's traditional love for a good horse, but withal a tender, intimate story which brings us close to a few people and makes us share their joys and sorrows. In every way Kentucky is a really notable screen offering and more than held its own in competition with

the brilliance of its preview setting and the glitter and sumptuousness of the Trocadero party which followed it. Competing, too, for top honors in the picture were production, photography, direction and cast, and in that competition the four contestants provide a photo finish, making it one of the most evenly balanced pictures of a season of notable productions. We had had other pictures about Kentucky, its men, women and horses, but none to compete with this one. Technicolor photography presents us with a series of prints of exquisite beauty which give factual values to their compositions instead of the impressionistic quality of black-and-white photography. For once I concede that technicolor lends box-office value to a picture.

When Blue Grass Wins . . .

 N^{EVER} before have we had the thoroughbred horse presented so nobly on the screen, and never a story which does such justice to his nobility. Darryl Zanuck now should match it with a picture which does equal justice to the dog. With so much to look at in Kentucky, the story had to be one with inherent strength to keep it from losing itself in the wealth of visual attractions, but the screen play by Lamar Trotti and John Taintor Foote keeps it as a strong thread which weaves its way through the scenes and holds them together with its emotional appeal, its main adhesive quality being another product of the state it deals with—a family feud which starts the picture in 1861 and ends with the 1938 fadeout. The final thrill, of course, is a horse race, the classic Kentucky Derby which, again of course, is won by the horse we want to see win, but so skilfully is the contest staged we hold our breath as the horses come down the stretch, thrill to the marrow

> BETTY BURBRIDGE Writer Republic

> > May I Pass Some of My Happiness to Welford Beaton for The Coming Year

JULIE HAYDON

when the loudspeaker screams, "Here comes Blue Grass on the outside!" for it is Blue Grass which carries our hopes, and when he wins we cheer, or at least the invited audience of screen-wise picture people which filled the Carthay Circle Theatre cheered as lustily as they would have cheered if tickets on Blue Grass had been in their pockets.

Direction, Performances, Excellent . . .

IRECTION by David Butler developes fully all D the possibilities of the story. He has given us another excellent picture, but with this one establishes a new peak. His love for horses and appreciation of human values seep through the physical movement of all his scenes. It is a picture which is not made great by great names; rather will it help to make names great. It brings recognition at last to Walter Brennan, who in a score of lesser parts revealed a talent which awaited only opportunity to assert itself, and here opportunity was presented to him. His performance is truly magnificent, an extraordinarily searching characterization of an old man, made more extraordinary by virtue of his being a young man. Loretta Young's talent and beauty make her the ideal heroine for such a story and Richard Greene is the perfect hero. This young Englishman is destined to make a great impression on American audiences. He is becoming more important with each appearance, and Kentucky will establish him firmly. Handsome, young, talented, he will go far. Moroni Olsen is another to whom this picture will give a forward push. It is the biggest part in which I have seen him, and he fully realizes all the possibilities his previous appearances have hinted at. A little boy, Bobs Watson, has an emotional scene which he makes great enough to earn the envy of the oldest trouper. Several colored people also contribute fine performances, as do, in fact, all the members of the long cast. Atmospheric music, under the direction of Louis Silvers, has much to do with making the picture such a worthy one. Photography which provides the visual treats is by Ray Rennahan and Ernest Palmer. The whole offering is vastly to the credit of Gene Markey, associate producer in charge. It was a big task, but the picture moves so smoothly across the screen we get the impression the story is telling itself. For

such a result a producer deserves praise. Praise, too, must be given Irene Morra for her expert film editing.

YOU MUST MEET GRACIE . . .

 SMILING ALONG: 20th-Fox release of Robert T. Kane production; director, Monty Banks; screen play, William Conselman; scenario editor, Val Valentine; dialogue, Rodney Ackland; photography, Mutz Greenbaum; film editor, James B. Clark; art director, Oscar Werndorff; dance director, Jack Donohue; musical director, Bretton Byrd. Stars Gracie Fields. Features Mary Maguire, Roger Livesey, Peter Coke, Jack Donohue, Skippy (dog). Supporting cast: Hay Petrie, Mike Johnson, Eddie Gray, Tommy Fields, Gladys Dehl, Nino Rossini, Edward Rigby, Joe Mott, Philip Leaver. Running time, 85 minutes. Film was made at Pinewood studio in England.

CEE Smiling Along and you will understand why OGracie Fields is the idol of picture fans in the farflung British Empire. She will be that over here if she appears in a few more pictures like this one. It is the best comedy-with-music I have seen in a long time. This Gracie person displays astonishing versatility. She has the illusive thing we call personality, so strongly born in her she is the center of the stage even when she is on the sidelines, standing still, doing nothing. And when you hear her sing you will agree that we have no comedienne who even approaches her as a songbird. The picture displays the wide range of her vocal attainments. In a stage scene she sings an eccentric comedy song; in a church, sacred music; on London Embankment, a blues song; in another spot, a Cockney ditty, and scattered among them are two or three others, all of which are sung in a manner which brought rounds of applause from a large preview audience composed of people who were seeing her for the first time and who therefore were not influenced by a previously engendered feeling of friendship for her. To top it all, she is an excellent actress of wide emotional range and with a penetrating grasp of the meaning of a scene. Gracie, in short, is one player we must credit with having everything.

British, But Not Narrowly So . . .

LTHOUGH Century produced the picture in Eng-A land and with its eye on the American market, it wisely refrained from striving to give it an American twist. It is purely British in story, casting, mood,

BRYAN FOY'S



Christmas Greetings To The People Who Make



The Spectator

flavor; but not so narrowly British it will lack universal appeal in this country. It will delight American audiences, as much for its refreshing newness to our eyes as for the newness to us of its brand of comedy. Monty Banks, who tried so hard to become a director of account over here but failed and tried his luck in London, has justified his confidence in himself. He has handled with competence the varied elements of Smiling Along, refraining from indulging in the still largely prevailing Hollywood custom of having players bombard one another with fusilades of words instead of talking in tones to match the moods of scenes. He makes his characters human, and makes us think we know them as people, not as actors. I never yet have seen an English picture with a poor cast, just as I never saw a poor cast in any play I have seen on a London stage. Those in Gracie's picture constitute an evenly balanced group of skilled performers. The story deals with the strenuous efforts of a stranded vaudeville troupe to get back on the road to success, consequently there is logic in the interpolation of each of the songs, dances and other bits of assorted entertainment. Smiling Along belongs on your must-see list. You really must meet Gracie.

DISTRESSING, PURPOSELESS . . .

● DAWN PATROL; Warners; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Robert Lord; director, Edmund Goulding; assistant director, Frank Heath; screen play, Seton I. Miller and Don Totheroh; original, John Monk Saunders; photographer, Tony Gaudio; special effects, Edwin A. DuPar; art director, John Hughes; film editor, Ralph Dawson; technical advisor, Capt. L. G. S. Scott; music, Max Steiner; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone, David Niven, Donald Crisp, Melville Cooper, Barry Fitzgerald, Carl Esmond, Peter Willes, Morton Lowry, Michael Brooke, James Burke, Stuart Hall, Herbert Evans, Sidney Bracy. Running time, 108 minutes.

DONE excellently, but for no apparent reason. It is not the anti-war picture the world is waiting for and producers are afraid to make because it might annoy their good friends, Hitler and Mussolini; it is a plea for better planes and longer training for our boys who go in the air to fight and fall to the earth to die. It deals with conditions existing at the time of the World War. Today we have modern planes and more thorough training, which make the picture out of date as a preachment. The story deals wholly with war; every man in it is in uniform and not a woman appears. For almost its entire length we hear the roar of plane propellers and the harsh voices of machine guns; we see men laughing at death and drinking hard liquor to chase the sham from their laughter. The spectre of death

haunts the film for its full footage, and it comes at a time when the things it deals with are things which depress the world, things we would forget if the world would let us. It is not an entertaining picture in theme or substance, even though it is directed brilliantly, acted competently and filled with the thrills of planes in combat. Physically it is an outstanding cinematic achievement, but a purposeless, futile one of fine young men fed endlessly into the man of war.

Cinematically a Good Job . . .

REDIT is due all those who had a hand in the making of Dawn Patrol when we regard it for what it is and are not disturbed by speculation as to why it was made. Edmund Goulding in his direction reveals a fine sense of dramatic values, ably sustaining the grimness of war and the quiet acceptance of his characters of the things they are called upon to face. The whole picture is a tragedy related in a minor vocal note, its people heroic, its villain death. I would award the chief acting honors to David Niven for a sustained performance of wide emotional range, running the gamut from frivolity to tragedy but never getting out of hand. The story dealing with a squadron of British Royal Flying Corps, it appropriately has been given an all-British cast which keeps it in atmosphere. Basil Rathbone gives us another of those intelligent, sensitive characterizations we have learned to expect from him. Errol Flynn and Donald Crisp also distinguish themselves. All the performances, in fact, are excellent. Tony Gaudio's photography always is noted for its artistic quality and never was better than we have it here. If you are looking for physical thrills and are impervious to the depressiveness of its story, Dawn Patrol may have something for you. My personal taste in screen entertainment does not run that way.



SEASON'S GREETINGS DORE SCHARY

MOUNTIES GET THEIR MAN . . .

● HEART OF THE NORTH: Warners release of First National picture; director, Lewis Seiler; associate producer, Bryan Foy. screen play, Lee Katz and Vincent Sherman; based on novel by William Byron Mowrey; assistant director, William Kissell; music by Adolph Deutsch; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; photography, L. William O'Connell; technicolor photography, Wilfred M. Cline; art director, Ted Smith; film editor, Louis Hesse; gowns, Milo Anderson. Cast: Dick Foran, Gloria Dickson, Gale Page, Allen Jenkins, Patric Knowles, Janet Chapman, James Stephenson, Anthony Averill, Joe Sawyer, Joseph King, Russell Simpson, Arthur Gardner, Garry Owen, Pedro de Cordoba, Alec Harford, Robert Homans, Anderson Lawlor, Bruce Caruthers. Running time, 74 minutes.

BRYAN FOY has done himself proud with this one. He takes us outdoors to what doubles for the Canadian Northwest—and looks enough like it to make the doubling reasonable—and there shows us the Mounties at work in surroundings which the picture makes us feel are the stages on which the noted force presents the dramas which have made it famous. The picture is shot in technicolor and contains many shots of such startling beauty we forget the story in our enjoyment of them. That is one of the drawbacks of color photography. Another is the added expense it incurs. In a picture whose story holds our attention to the exclusion of all other considerations, we are not aware of the color, hence the money spent on it is wasted. If the color attracts our attention as an individual element of the creation, it is at the expense of the entertainment quality of the picture. Heart of the North is too beautiful for its own good, but not as beautiful as our imagination would have painted it if it had been shot in black and white to give imagination an opportunity to function.

Hero to the Rescue . . .

CRAMMED with virile action from the outset, the story moves along swiftly and logically. A corking fight on the brink of a cliff is its chief physical thrill, and its last ounce of thrill is wrung from it

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before the hero gives the villain his comeuppance. By that time the hero has punched the villain over the cliff into the lake, has jumped after him to finish the poor devil with a knockout punch. Most exciting. Another thrill comes when a mob of infuriated trappers, for a purely cinematically manufactured reason which lacks sufficient logic to justify it, is on the point of lynching that admirable actor, Russell Simpson, who is saved in the nick of time—of course you have guessed it-by the arrival of the hero who places the blame where it belongs. Even if you scorn the logic, you cannot get away from the dangling rope, and therein lies the thrill. Even with its drawbacks, Heart of the North is one of the better outdoor pictures of the season. Dick Foran proves a likable, manly and efficient hero; Allen Jenkins a competent and sympathetic team-mate; Joe Sawyer a dynamic and particularly vicious acting villain, and Joseph King a crafty plotter in the background. Gloria Dickson, whose impressive performance in a Federal Theatre play a few years ago prompted me to predict screen honors for her, justifies the prediction by giving a really excellent characterization as the distressed daughter of Simpson. The role of the latter is confined to a few scenes, but, as always, he is the complete master of them. Gale Page and the clever little Janet Chapman provide two other engaging feminine elements in this predominatingly heman offering. Lewis Seiler's direction is without a flaw, being one of the neatest jobs of the sort I have seen in some time. Photography by William O'Con-

Season's Greetings

Ralph Byrd



Greetings

LeROY PRINZ

Paramount Studio

nell and Wilfrid Cline, and film editing by Louis Hesse, as well as the music by Adolph Deutsch are valuable contributions to a wholly satisfactory piece of screen entertainment.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING . . .

• SWEETHEARTS; MGM; producer, Hunt Stromberg; director, W. S. Van Dyke II; screen play, Dorothy Parker and Alan Campbell; based on the operetta "Sweethearts;" book and lyrics, Fred de Gresac, Harry B. Smith and Robert B. Smith music, Victor Herbert; musical adaptation, Herbert Stothart; special lyrics, Bob Wright and Chet Forrest; dances and ensembles, Albertina Rasch; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art director, Joseph Wright; set decorations, Edwin B. Willis; musical presentations, Merrill Pye; gowns, Adrian; photographer, Oliver T. Marsh; technicolor photographer, Allen Davey; technicolor color director, Natalie Kalmus; associate technicolor color director, Henri Jaffa; montage effects, Slavko Vorkapich; film editor, Robert J. Kern. Running time, 110 minutes.

TREAT for both the eyes and ears until it passes A the point of saturation by our visual and aural senses. Metro experts have brought sound recording to such perfection that we get the impression Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy are in better voice than ever before. Here they have the songs of Victor Herbert to sing, and the orchestra has Victor Herbert music to play, and from the screen there comes to us a veritable torrent of melody. And a veritable torrent of color glides past our eyes as we view the screen. Albertina Rasch girls in filmy gowns of various shades float through dances beautiful to view; vocal ensembles make their contributions to the feast of music, provided for our ears; solos and duets by the two stars and superb playing by a large orchestra amplify the feast until the theatre rings with melody. And for one hour and fifty minutes the feast goes on -as much as we get from the living stage, but without the intermissions the living stage provides. The preview audience was charmed from the outset and was generous with its applause. The early numbers by Jeanette and Eddy were warmly applauded, but by the time the end of the first hour was reached the applause diminished until some of the finest numbers of the two were followed by silence.

Too Rich for Good Direction . . .

 $m{0}^{NE'S}$ capacity for absorbing esthetic entertainment is easily satisfied. Sweethearts goes beyond the point of absorption. In addition to all the other

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dazzling scenes, it presents a gorgeous style show in which the lovely Jeanette models all the dazzling dress creations and technicolor photography developes strikingly all their colors. It really is too much, a feast composed exclusively of rich dishes and too many of them. Served in black and white, instead of in color, it would be easier to take. Technicolor photography is justified in the case of Kentucky, by the nature of the compositions, the soft hues of the outof-doors and the contrasting physical vigor of many scenes. Kentucky has much visual esthetic appeal, but it also has a thrilling horse race with its physical appeal. A horse race instead of a style show, would have been a blessed relief in Sweethearts. Hunt Stromberg, producer of the picture, is paid so much by Metro his right to it is being challenged in a New York court, yet he reveals himself so poorly posted on the fundamentals of the art he serves as to be unaware there is a limit to audience resistance to prolonged drumming on one note. With twenty minutes less running time, Sweethearts would be perhaps the finest musical picture we have had. If you sit through its first hour, then leave, you will remember it fondly as delightful entertainment; if you see it through, you will remember how tired it made you.

Technically a Triumph...

VIEWING Sweethearts for what it is, not for what it should have been, only words of praise can express one's appreciation of the excellence of its technical achievements and the performances of those composing its long cast. The Cedric Gibbons sets achieve extraordinary beauty. A sequence shot by that wizard in montage, Slavko Vorkapich, is a striking demonstration of the power to crowd a lot of story into a minute of running time. The story itself is an interesting treatment of a stage success. Victor Herbert's Sweethearts is but an element in the screen Sweethearts story, but its music runs all the way through the screen version. Jeanette and Eddy are married when the story opens, starring jointly in the Herbert musical, and they are the sweethearts of

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the story. As it progressed, my hope increased that at last we were to have a love story without conflict in it, that whatever conflict the drama demanded would not involve disturbance of the mutual love and faith of the two principals. It proved too much to hope for, but by the time the romance was threatened. I was worn out to the point of not caring anyway, so I do not hold it as a major fault in story construction.

KAY FRANCIS SCORES . . .

● COMET OVER BROADWAY; Warners production and release; directed by Busby Berkeley; associate producer, Bryan Foy; screen play by Mark Hellinger; from Cosmopolitan maazine story by Faith Baldwin; photographed by James Wong Howe; art director, Charles Novi; film editor, James Gibbons; sound by Charles Lang; unit manager, Louis Baum; gowns by Orry-Kelly. Stars Kay Francis. Supporting cast: John Litel, Ian Hunter, Minna Gombell, Sybil Jason, Donald Crisp, Ian Keith, Marcia Ralston, Clem Bevans, Edward McWade, Vera Lewis, Melville Cooper, Chester Clute, Jack Mower. Running time, 69 minutes.

IER last for Warners under her old contract is one **H** of the best things Kay Francis has done on the screen. Her Comet Over Broadway performance demonstrates the foolishness of her studio in having vented its displeasure over her insistence that it should live up to its contract with her, by assigning her to parts in unimportant pictures. Kay herself makes this one important, as she would have made any picture in which she had been given half a chance. I admire the cheerfulness with which she accepted every part that came her way and the honesty of her performance in each of them. In Comet Over Broadway she was fortunate in having a skilfully constructed screen play by Mark Hellinger and Robert Buckner, and really brilliant direction by Busby Berkeley. Busby handles the lights and shades of the story with authority and conviction which put him among the directors to be reckoned with in the future. In response to his sensitive direction, Kay is at her best, and performs the somewhat difficult task of holding our sympathy, making us get her point of view, even though she goes to the length of what practically amounts to deserting her child. It is a strong human drama from the first to the last scene, far superior as an emotional document to the major-

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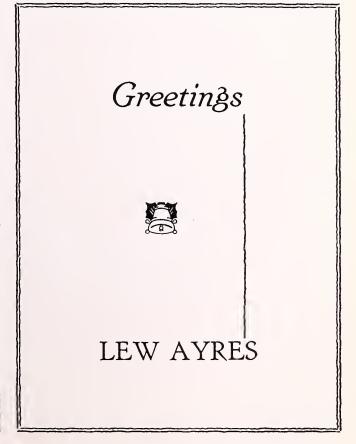
... Season's Greetings ...

WILLIAM BERKE **PRODUCER** Republic

ity of million-dollar epics the studio has given us. It will create a demand for more appearances of Kay Francis, and I will be surprised if some other studio does not take advantage of it.

Production and Cast Good . . .

MOUNTED on a scale which permitted Jimmy Howe to display his great mastery with the camera, Comet Over Broadway is attractive visually. The story starts in a small town, follows a sleeperjump theatrical troupe, pauses in New York, jumps to London, back to New York and ends outside prison walls; it runs the emotional gamut from the drabness of the prison to the glitter of triumphs on New York and London stages, but always it is convincing and will hold your close attention as it moves steadily and logically across the screen. Running down the names as they follow Kay's in the screen credits: Ian Hunter always to me is one of the most engaging leading men in pictures. I never have known him to give a poor performance, never failing to be completely and sympathetically the person he plays. Here we have him at his established best. John Litel, who, although he has the chief motivating part, is seen but seldom, but makes each appearance count. Donald Crisp is excellent as the quiet, self-effacing, lawyer friend of Kay and Litel. Minna Gombell, as a trouper who for all the years the story covers, "soon will be forty," is the acting surprise of the picture, surprising because I have seen her so seldom I almost had forgotten her. I hope some talent scout will



spot her in Comet Over Broadway. I would like to see her oftener. Little Sybil Jason, another excellent trouper neglected of late, is one of the picture's attractions. Another is Leona Marical who glitters coldly as a jealous and selfish actress.

EXCEEDINGLY LIVELY AFFAIR . . .

• SWING, SISTER, SWING; Universal picture and release; director, Joseph Santley; associate producer, Burt Kelly; screen play, Charles Grayson; original story, Burt Kelly; photography, Elwood Bredell; art director, Jack Otterson; associate art director, Ralph DeLacy; film editor, Frank Gross; set decorations, R. A. Gausman; gowns, Vera West; musical director, Charles Previn; songs, "Wasn't It You?" and "The Baltimore Bubble," music by Frank Skinner; lyrics by Charles Henderson; dance director, Matty King; sound, Bernard B. Brown and Jess A. Moulin. Cast: Ken Murray, Johnny Downs, Kathryn Kane, Eddie Quillan, Ernest Truex, Edna Sedgwick, Nana Bryant, Esther Howard, Herbert Heywood, Clara Blandick, Ted Weems and his orchestra. Running time, 63 minutes.

WILL please the customers who like their music loud and rapid and their dances fast and rabid. And there is something in it for the rest of you who take your screen seriously. Burt Kelly, who wrote the story and produced the picture, apparently is a disciple of the school of thought which holds that the screwy dances now in public favor are only a rapidly passing fancy. His story has two heroes (Johnny Downs and Eddie Quillan) and one heroine (Kathryn Kane), residents in a small town. In their recreational hours they develope a dance with new convulsions in it. Ken Murray, who went to New York from the same small town and comes back for a short visit with his mother, sees the dance, takes the youngsters to New York where their wiggles win public favor and earn for them a series of hops from theatre to theatre until they reach Los Angeles. You think you are witnessing a variation of the small-town-boy-makes-good theme, but you are mistaken. The farther west the show travels the smaller the audiences become, and as an attraction the adventure dies out here because public fancy had switched to some other series of wiggles.

Live Happily Ever After . . .

OUR small town people go back to the small town and we are left to assume they live happily ever after. The money they earned goes into a modern service station. Johnny gets Kathryn and Eddie gets a job. It is light entertainment, nicely directed by Joseph Santley from Charles Grayson's screen play. I was glad to see Eddie Quillan on the screen again. Hollywood has neglected him sadly. For at least ten years I have regarded him as one of the cleverest young actors in pictures, one who today could be a box-office star if some producer had realized his possibilities. He first attracted my attention in 1928 when he played the lead in a picture called Show Folks. The girl who played opposite him also attracted my attention, and I predicted in my review that each of them was destined to have a brilliant screen career. For some years Eddie's success was proving me a good prophet, but more recently he has

been appearing but seldom. The girl got along all right. You probably have heard of her. Her name is Carole Lombard. Johnny Downs is another boy with an ingratiating personality and acting ability. He does well in this picture. Ernest Truex gives us one of his clever comedy performances, and the others in the cast are satisfactory. Dances staged by Matty King are rhythmic and strenuous enough to please the young people. The musical contributions under the direction of Charles Previn add greatly to the entertainment quality of the picture.

SCARCELY BELIEVABLE . . .

● THE DUKE OF WEST POINT; Edward Small-UA; producer, Edward Small; director, Alfred E. Green; technical director, Lieut. Walter K. Tuller, Jr.; assistant director, Charles Kerr; original screen play, George Bruce; photography, Robert Planck; art director, John DuCasse Schulze; film editor, Grant Whytock; musical director, Frank Tours. Cast: Louis Hayward, Joan Fontaine, Tom Brown, Richard Carlson, Alan Curtis, Donald Barry, Gaylord Pendleton, Charles D. Brown, Jed Prouty, Marjorie Gateson, Emma Dunn, George McKay, James Flavin, Nick Lukats, Kenneth Harlan, Jonathan Hale, William Bakewell, Art Raymond, Anthony Nace, Mary MacLaren, Edward Earle, Alan Connor, Charles Irwin, Tom Hanlon, Running time, 105 minutes.

MY PERSONAL reaction to another picture with a West Point background is that it has nothing new to offer in a physical way to give the background glamour. We have seen the buildings and the marching cadets in so many pictures. It is to the story, then, we must look for entertainment when another

TREETER

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from

JOSEPH VALENTINE A.S.C.

AAAAAAA

West Point film is offered us. Here we encounter a weak story with a thought in it out of which a strong story could have been written. It presents us with the old device of making an obnoxious smartaleck of the hero in order to clean him up in the last sequence. It certainly manages to make the hero obnoxious enough, but the kick in it is that he proves himself just as good in all the academic sports as he assured the academy population he would be. The fundamental weakness of a story of this sort is that the egotistic ego of the hero which makes him unpopular with his classmates, makes him unpopular with the audience also, and in this picture it is carried to the point of boredom. The story turns on the sacrifice the hero makes as a gesture of friendship for a classmate. A stronger story would have resulted if all the wisecracking had been omitted and the hero had been made popular from the outset. A particularly irritating sequence is one in which he visits a girl at a time the regulations called for his being in bed, an escapade which proves to be without story value.

Not the Right Hero Type . . .

UNWISE was the choice of Louis Hayward for the hero role if the wisecracking had to be a part of the characterization. There is inherent charm in Hayward's personality, a suggestion of breeding, of gentlemanliness which make his obnoxious freshness unconvincing to the point of our refusal to believe the kind of man he is would do the things he does. His naturalness in other roles has made us accept him as the persons he played; here we see him only as an actor playing a part, doing things because the script demands them. Al Green's translation of the story into screen terms is good direction and he cannot be blamed if the picture does not give satisfaction. Nor can any fault be found with any of the performances as such. Joan Fontaine is ornamental and efficient as the girl Hayward gets in the end, but her performance suffers as his does, as we refuse to believe such a nice, refined girl could fall in love with such a bumptious ass as he is characterized. In spots painful efforts are made to drag in comedy. An example: Hayward, in transporting his mattress to his quarters, drapes it over his head in a manner which makes it impossible to see where he is going, trips over something, falls, lies on the mattress, and treats Joan to some equally unfunny wisecracks. Infantile stuff, as is a country boy eating an apple with sound effects. All the values the picture have come from the fine production Edward Small provided. As a visual depiction of life at



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West Point it is to be classed among the better pictures.

SIDNEY TOLER IS ALL RIGHT . . .

 CHARLIE CHAN IN HONOLULU; 20th-Fox; associate producer, John Stone; director, H. Bruce Humberstone; original screen play, Charles Belden; based on the character "Charlie Chan;" created by Earl Derr Biggers; photography, Charles Clarke; art directors, Richard Day and Haldane Douglas; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Helen A. Myron; musical director, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Sidney Toler, Phyllis Brooks, Sen Yung, Eddie Collins, John King, Claire Dodd, George Zucco, Robert Barrat, Marc Lawrence, Richard Lane, Layne Tom, Jr., Paul Harvey. Running time, 65 minutes.

CIDNEY TOLER was handed a tough assignment When chosen to carry on the Charlie Chan series which the late Warner Oland had made famous and which returned the compliment by making Warner famous. To millions of people Warner was Chan, and now they are asked to accept another as the noted detective. After viewing the first of the Toler series, Charlie Chan In Honolulu, I feel Sidney will win his way through. He gives an excellent performance, and before the second reel is far advanced his acceptance will be complete. His first story is better than the last in which I saw Warner, but it still leaves one wishing the Century people would reveal in the series some consciousness of the element which makes crime detection pictures good box-office. Murder mystery novels have a fixed and important place in the book business mainly through their appeal to



Merry Christmas, Welford. I knew you when, but I keep mum. PETE SMITH



intellectual readers. In each of them there is a challenge to the reader to solve the mystery before the detective announces its solution. The reader, therefore, is interested only in the details of the crime and the clues he can fit into place as the story proceeds. A murder myster picture, to be successful, should adhere to the book technique and avoid the inclusion of scenes which have no direct, even though not readily apparent, bearing on the crime.

Wanders Around Too Much . . .

BY THE inclusion of extraneous comedy sequences and other elements which contribute nothing to the solution of the mystery, the Chan series is not appealing to the tremendous audience which takes an intelligent interest in crime detection. The first appearance of Sidney Toler as the Oriental detective is in a picture which will appeal more to children than to adults. It goes to the extreme limit of introducing a large collection of wild animals which take no part in the motivation of the story and retard its forward motion by being the excuse for comedy scenes which distract our attention from the thread of the story. An audience which can be entertained by a wrestling match between a comedian and a lion, cannot at the same time be entertained by its interest in the solution of a crime; and those whose taste for mysteries takes them to a film theatre, can get little satisfaction from viewing the gratuitously interpolated wrestling match. Everything in the picture is done well enough, and in what I have said there is no implication of adverse criticism of the production, direction or performances. As is generally the case with pictures of the sort, you will spot the guilty person before the story gets well under way. I did, and also as generally is the case, I was wrong, as you will be. That is what makes pictures of the sort interesting, so if you are patient enough to sit through the distractions, Charlie Chan In Honolulu may have something for you.

ABOVE THE AVERAGE MUSICAL . . .

● GOING PLACES; Warners; executive producer. Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Benjamin Glazer; screen play, Sig Herzig, Jerry Wald and Maurice Leo; based upon the play, "The Hottentot," by Victor Mapes and William Collier, Sr.; director, Ray Enright; assistant director, Jesse Hibbs; photography, Arthur L. Todd; film editor, Clarence Kolster; art director, Hugh Reticker; music and lyrics, Harry Warren and Johnny Mercer; songs, "Mutiny In the Nursery," "Say It With a Kiss," "Jeepers Creepers," "Oh, What a Horse Was Charley;" arrangements, Ray Heindorf and Frank Perkins; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; gowns, Howard Shoup. Cast: Dick Powell, Anita Louise, Allen Jenkins, Ronald Reagan, Walter Catlett, Harold Huber, Larry Williams, Thurston Hall, Minna Gombell, Joyce Compton, Robert Warwick, John Ridgely, Joe Cunningham, Eddie Anderson, George Reed, Louis Armstrong, Maxine Sullivan, Running time, 85 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ALL there. Some bang-up musical numbers, good comedy situations, amusing patter, and fast and exciting action combine to create a musical which rates well above the average. With that old dependable The Hottentot for their inspiration, Sig Herzig, Jerry Wald, and Maurice Leo have turned out a

screen play which has easy movement, a sustained farcical spirit, and an unusually punchy climax. The wild horse which Dick Powell is inveigled into riding in the big steeplechase can be controlled only by the strains of a ditty, Jeepers Creepers, and Louis Armstrong and his band, in a truck, endeavor to parallel the course of the horse. I guarantee you will come out of the theatre humming the tune, so thoroughly does it work itself under the skin. I am still humming it—and "truckin" and "shaggin" no end. Another number done by the remarkable lipped Trumpeter Armstrong and his colored entertainers is Mutiny In the Nursery, which, though possessing no great intrinsic musicality, is indeed a rocking, sizzling affair. The songs were by Harry Warren and Johnny Mercer, and they owe not a little of their effectiveness to the arrangements by Ray Heindorf and Frank Perkins.

Could Have Sung Another . . .

DICK POWELL, as the young sporting goods salesman who is sent to the Maryland steeplechase to masquerade as a famous Australian gentleman rider, makes the most of the comic possibilities of his role, is especially funny on the back of the wild Jeepers Creepers. Anita Louise is comely and engaging as the aristocratic girl in the story. Allen Jenkins and Harold Huber get a good many laughs as a pair of gangster gamblers, Walter Catlett is amusing, and Ronald Reagan was liked by the audience. Other members of the large cast give good accounts of themselves. The surprise of the picture, however, was Louis Arm-

May the Spectator's Christmas

be something for it to

remember on Thanksgiving Day

ANN DVORAK
LESLIE FENTON



strong, who, in addition to instrumental and vocal renditions in his inimitable syle, turns out to be a very natural but expressive comedian. His "mnymnph" to express incredulity quite tickled the audience. Credit for much of the laughter throughout the picture, however, should be given to Director Ray Enright, who has brought to the picture an alive sense of humor and a showman-like aptitude for timing. The sets and backgrounds of Hugh Reticker are tastefully executed or chosen, and given good photographic treatment by Arthur L. Todd. Competent editing, too, from Clarence Kolster. The accomplished Leo Forbstein was, of course, in charge of the music. Apropos, patrons will like Maxine Sullivan, colored entertainer, who is featured in the nursery song. Powell sings one romantic number, Say It With a Kiss, which is pretty enough, but methings he could have sung another. One should not neglect assets, especially when they can so naturally be brought into play.

MISSES ITS MARK . . .

● PARIS HONEYMOON; Paramount production and release; director, Frank Tuttle; producer, Harlan Thompson; screen play, Frank Butler and Don Hartman; based on Angela Sherwood's story; songs, "I Have Eyes," "The Funny Old Hills," "Sweet Little Headache," "Joobalai" and "Work While You May," by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin; musical direction, Boris Morros; musical advisor, Arthur Franklin; photography, Karl Struss; art direction, Hans Dreier and Roland Anderson; film editor, Archie Marshek; costumes, Edith Head; dance direction, LeRoy Prinz; sound recording, Earl Hayman and Walter Oberst; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman. Costars Bing Crosby and Franciska Gaal. Supporting cast: Akim Tamiroff, Shirley Ross, Edward Everett Horton, Ben Blue, Rafaela Ottiano, Gregory Gaye, Luana Walters, Alex Melesh, Victor Kilian, Michael Visaroff. Running time, 83 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

THERE is some entertainment in Bing's new one, but not as much as there should be. Inadequate story material seems to be the chief handicap. The plot is a pretty simple and familiar fictional thread incorrigible minx at last wins the love of the hero away from his less worthy fiancee—though the same thread many times before has been hung with interesting characterization and amusing sub-situations, and has turned out to be diverting fare. In this instance the hangings are so meager there is little else but thread. And in the spots where the scriptists think it looks too bare, they have thrown on large hunks of slapstick. Not that all the blame for the shortcomings can be laid to the scriptists. There seems to be a confusion all around as to whether the production is a play with music or a musical play, between which there is a big difference. Comparatively slight story material and only fairly subtle acting will suffice if emphasis is on musical numbers. But in Paris Honeymoon the five musical numbers are so spaced, and mostly so quiet in nature, that the characters and story take over most of our interest. Yet the whole thing is written and acted in a musical comedy key. The slapstick, of course, bounds outside the license we usually allow musical comedy material. It is as fantastic and photographically jerky as the old Mack Sennett stuff. Suffice to say

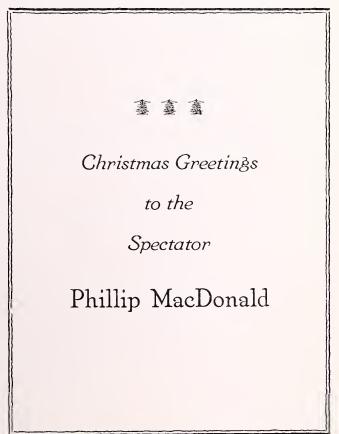
that the story does not get much of anywhere and is lacking in human interest values.

Song Numbers Are Good ...

CROSBY has his best moments during the song numbers, which he sings in good form, imbuing them with the vocal pleasantness, the imaginative variations, and the emotional warmth which have characterized his best singing in the past. The part of the young American millionaire who takes over an old castle in the Balkans and proceeds to fall for a madcap peasant girl, however, has this disadvantage: the chap spends most of his time reacting to other people rather than being the center of meaty sinations. In short, it is a somewhat negative part. And to top things, Bing's always casual acting manner has never been more casual. Franciska Gaal impresses one as being a clever artist; she is scintillating and commands our sympathy at other times, but somehow, like the picture itself, her performance just misses its mark. The characterization is inconsistently written, of course. Anyone so ignorant as to hold her hands over a driver's eyes until the car bolts halfway up a mountain side, never can seem completely like a human being. Moreover, she is not an especially good team-mate for Crosby. Their acting styles are so varied.

How Could He Leave Her? . . .

A^S THE other woman, Shirley Ross seemed like a very nice person whom the authors and director were trying to make appear in a bad light, and who





SEASON'S GREETINGS
TO THE
SPECTATOR —

J. Carrol Naish

BOB HOPE

"Thanks For The Memory"



was really more sinned against than sinning. I'm afraid most spectators will question Bing's judgment in throwing her over. A romantic song she sings with the latter over a telephone, is nicely done. Akim Tamiroff gives another of his excellent characterizations, each of which has a markedly individual appearance and psychology. Edward Everett Horton and Ben Blue get some good laughs. A really funny gag is the use of a rare liquor which causes the imbiber to indulge in every manner of distortion. Blue ends up with his feet on the counter, his head on the floor. Miss Ross and Crosby make the most of their convulsions too. Individual scenes have been handled very well by Frank Tuttle, both humorous and sensitive ones. An admirable feature of the picture is the use of music to point parts of the action, creative work in itself from Boris Morros and Arthur Franklin. Of the songs by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin, audiences will especially go for I Have Eyes and Sweet Little Headache, which have very pleasant lilts and sentiments. Karl Struss has contributed some finely done photographic compositions. There has been no stinting on sets, costumes, or extras, and a good deal of color of the Balkan sort results. Better luck next time.

THIN MANNISH AND THIN . . .

● THERE'S THAT WOMAN AGAIN: Columbia production and release; director, Alexander Hall; associate producer, B. B. Kahane; story, Gladys Lehman: based upon a work by Wilson Collison; screen play, Philip G. Epstein, James Edward Grant and Ken Englund: photography, Joseph Walker; film editor, Viola Lawrence; art direction, Lionel Banks; interior decorations, Babs Johnstone; sound engineer, George Cooper; musical director, M. W. Stoloff; gowns, Kalloch. Stars Melvyn Douglas and Virginia Bruce. Supporting cast: Margaret Lindsay, Stanley Ridges, Gordon Oliver, Tom Dugan. Don Beddoe, Jonathan Hale, Pierre Watkin, Paul Harvey. Running time, 70 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

LAVISH waste of talent and production values. A Though based on the often successful Thin Man pattern, it misses the requisite sophistication and whimsicality. The detective (Melvyn Douglas) has a wife (Virginia Bruce) who is more of a handicap than a helpmate, being afflicted with an abyssmal dumbness. He insults her throughout the picture, asks her why he ever married her, introduces her to acquaintances with a patronizing air. Not that he doesn't really love his wife, of course; several brief hints of affection assure us otherwise. It's just his way, and because he is a driven man, if you get the idea. A good deal of the action is given over to horseplay and slapstick, which slows up the progress of the plot and does not compensate for it with sufficient wit or any intriguing character portrayal. In fairness to the picture I must record that there were several good rounds of laughter from the audience, mostly in the slapstick portions, but I believe it was a generous audience, come to Hollywood to see the pretty Christmas lights and bent on having a good time. And the laughter was not strong throughout the picture. I drew Harlen up in his seat two or three times and instructed him to quit acting like a meanie

and become amused. But it was no go. He found the piece labored and insipid.

What About the Gem? . . .

IN THE plot itself are several sizable holes. The discovery that both murdered men had been shot by pistols concealed in wall safes, which went off automatically when the safes were opened, does not seem a stupendous deduction for a detective. In the middle of the picture the wife, having stolen some keys, enters a jewelry shop at night, breaks open a case and helps herself to a diamond bracelet. What object she had in going to the jewelry store I never knew, though some motive may have been worked in which I missed while in one of my slumping spells. What I did not miss was the fact that no mention was made thereafter of the gem she had pilfered. Moreover, the husband, through tracing the heel of a lady's slipper, finds that his wife was in the jewelry store this night, when a man was murdered, and merely drops the matter. If this is story telling, I'm Santa Claus. A paucity of humorous invention is reached when, during the wife's eerie moments in the jewlery store, a cat climbs into a suit of armor and wiggles it, a radio gets switched on, emitting a voice which says, "Hands up."

Dumb Heroines Not Popular . . .

NE of my favorite screen personalities is the beauteous Virginia Bruce. It is a pity to see her charm obscured by superimposed comic mannerisms and having to commit one poorly motivated inanity after the other. Generally speaking, the public does not like its heroes and heroines to be dumb. But if a central character is dense, it still must have a certain integrity, a substance, which the interest of spectators can grasp hold of. Spectators must believe in a character in order to experience either admiration or sympathy. Miss Bruce's part is utterly artificial. Melvyn Douglas plays with his usual deftness, but no actor is better than his material. Margaret Lindsay gives an efficient stock performance of a lady crook, handicapped by a make-up like a burlesque queen's. Stanley Ridges is very good as another crook. Don Beddoe stands out, as does Jonathan Hale and Pierre Watkin. I should like to say that Alexander Hall made the best use he could of his material, but I fear his direction was heavy-handed much of the time. The piece is handsomely mounted. Kalloch has pro-

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Ina Roberts, Editor and Publisher 1742 North Edgemont Street Hollywood, California—OLympia 3968

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A Pamphlet Guide to Book-Film Cooperation

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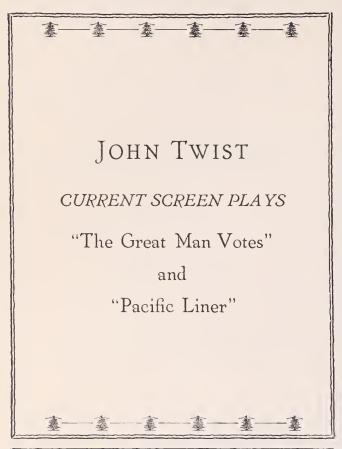
Merry Christmas

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Anton Grot

FRED ASTAIRE





BEST WISHES



CESAR ROMERO

vided striking raiment for the women, and the sets by Lionel Banks, decorated by Babs Johnstone, are very la-de-da. All is tastefully photographed by Joseph Walker. Five minds contributed to the story material.

KANIN DOES IT AGAIN . . .

● NEXT TIME I MARRY; RKO production and release; director, Garson Kanin; producer, Cliff Reid; screen play, John Twist, Helen Meinardi; story by Thames Williamson; production executive, Lee Marcus; musical director, Roy Webb; photography, Russell Metty; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Albert D'Agostino; gowns, Renie; film editor, Jack Hively. Cast: Lucille Ball, James Ellison, Lee Bowman, Granville Bates, Mantan Moreland, Elliott Sullivan, Murray Alper. Running time, 65 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ENJOY ABLE little show. Garson Kanin, with the direction of the impressive A Man to Remember already to his credit, appears to be emerging as a modern prophet to point the way for the motion picture industry out of the wilderness of excessive investment and diminishing returns. What this unpretentious comedy cost to produce I do not know, but many of its scenes are laid on the open highway or in other outdoor locations, and evidently the expenditure was but a fraction of that devoted to socalled A pictures. Yet Next Time I Marry packs several times the entertainment value of the rank and file of costlier pictures I have seen recently. The screen play itself, though competently put together, is nothing original; has, in fact, a reminiscent ring. A young man finds himself married to a wealthy heiress by a purely mercenary arrangement, a circumstance involving his dog. Young man, however, is aggravated by her snootiness and high-handedness, decides to get the divorce first, locks her in his trailer and starts off for Reno. The taming of the shrew begins. Granting that old reliable situations have been imaginatively touched up by the scriptists and that the dialogue is amusing, the material could have been made into quite ordinary film fare.

Pantomime Is Played Up . . .

T IS principally Kanin's handling of the material which gives vitality and freshness to the picture. And I suspect, too, there are many little touches in the film which were not indicated in the script. For Kanin is a director of imagination. He has a keen sense of characterization and of story values, especially as related to the motion picture. All the situations are nicely nursed. Pantomime plays a good part in the process. At Reno, the girl, finding herself really not very happy when on the verge of losing the chap, and seeking an excuse to enter the garage where he has taken a job, raises a pistol and shoots two holes into a tire of the expensive car in which she has been riding. The colored chauffeur, dumfounded, merely bends forward and watches the wheel sink down, down to the ground. The whole picture has spontaneity, casualness, warmth. It has some of the spirit of Vivacious Lady or It Happened One Night.

Leading Players Score . . .

DOTH Lucille Ball and James Ellison do the best D work I have seen them do, and they should win many new friends. A scene in which they pull each other into a lake and carry on with ducking one another, was very playful and infectious. Miss Ball plays with noticeably greater flexibility, range, and understanding than she has shown before; Ellison brings virility, a sense of humor and a great deal of personality to the part of the young man whose idea of success is to see something of the world. Good scene is where he casually borrows a hose from a gardener and cools off his irate bride and the inside of his trailer, which her rage has led her to set on fire. Lee Bowman does well as the designing foreigner to whom the heiress has become engaged and who follows her to Reno, though I did think his work could have stood a little more accentuation. There is only a handful of principals. Granville Bates, Mantan Moreland, Elliott Sullivan, and Murray Alper are all well cast. Russell Metty's photography was a good feature, and first-rate editing has been done by Jack Hively. The screen play was written by John Twist and Helen Meinardi, working from an original by Thames Williamson.

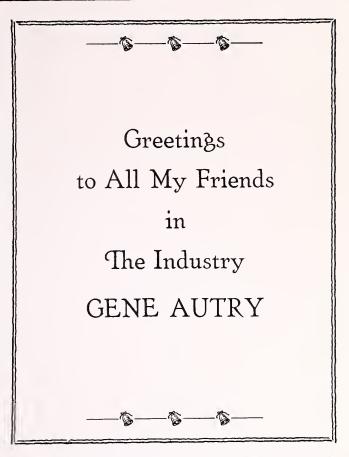
FRONTIER FLAVOR . . .

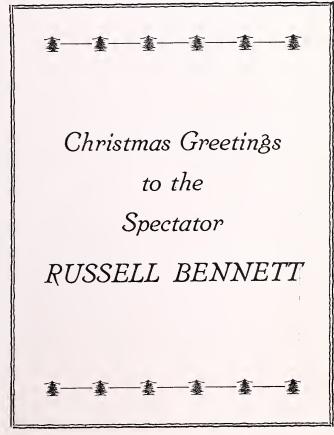
● TOM SAWYER, DETECTIVE; Paramount; associate producer, Edward T. Lowe; director, Louis King; assistant director, George Hippard; screen play, Lewis Foster, Robert Yost and Stuart Anthony; based on the novel by Mark Twain; photographer, Ted Tetzlaff; art directors, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; film editor, Ellsworth Hoagland; musical Director, Boris Morros. Cast: Billy Cook, Donald O'Connor, Porter Hall, Philip Warren, Janet Waldo, Elisabeth Risdon, William Haade, Edward J. Pawley, Clem Bevans, Raymond Hatton, Howard Mitchell, Stanley Price, Harry Worth, Clara Blandick, Si Jenks, Etta McDaniel, Oscar Smith, Running time, 64 minutes.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

WHAT David Selznick's version of the Mark W Twain classic, Tom Sawyer, held in glamor, Director Louis King's sequel, Tom Sawyer, Detective, has in color and warmth. The first edition of this immortal story was top-heavy with over-careful production. Tom was never permitted to get his face dirty or to act like a kid. The interested parties seemed to be conscious of the fact that they were creating a piece of cinema art. The Paramount edition tells a straightforward narrative with plenty of light touches and down-to-earth kiddishness that has appeal. Director King has turned out a smoothly fashioned picture with all the flavor of Arkansas during the middle years of the last century. The picture is native American down to the cheroot and catfish. If Twain had to choose between the two pictures, I'd put my money on King's film. A word of credit, too, to Screen Writers Lewis Foster, Robert Yost and Stuart Anthony who retained so much of Twain and yet gave the narrative enough zip and pace for camera purposes. That should be a difficult job for any

(Continued on page 35)







Frank McDonald's Christmas Greetings



DALTON TRUMBO

Screen Writer

RKO-Radio

SCREEN MUSICIANS

By Bruno David Ussher

LMOST another year has passed and it will be A time to count results of the last twelve months as far as motion picture music is concerned. I am not sure whether 1938 has yielded as many important scores as the previous years. If not, one need not feel discouraged. Development does not always show on the surface. What is more significant than isolated outstanding scores, are the concerted efforts by the National Federation of Music Clubs and the General Federation of Women's Clubs in cooperation with the Hollywood headquarters of the office of the Association of Motion Picture Producers of America; in short, the Hays' office. There the work of Mrs. Thomas Winter and of Mrs. H. D. Field is producing growingly intelligent perception, appreciation and support of finer musical efforts in connection with the cinema. Mrs. Grace Widey Mabee has rallied active interest among club women. Before this actually is in the hands of the readers, one of these music round-table groups will have been the guests of Warner Brothers, being initiated into some of the finer points by Max Steiner, brilliantly resourceful music veteran of the films. Film music appreciation, like time, marches on.

Unacademically Speaking . . .

WHAT of music and the Motion Picture Academy? The 1938 music awards glaringly bespoke an absence of intelligent classifications and corresponding conditions and values. Much as I admired Stokowski and his contribution to film music in One Hundred Men and a Girl, splendid as Universal's share in the picture was, I had to deplore its being given first prize. My reason set forth in these pages then was that this award put a premium on a compilation score in which large portions were borrowed (most successfully, it is true) from classics. I contended, however, that to pit Wagner and Tschaikowsky against a Stothart or Kern, a Romberg, Newman, Bennett, Steiner, Lange, for instance, was not fair, for obvious reasons. Some excellent names could be added to this random list. A typical Hawaiian singing-saw tune was chosen as the best song. How did the song writers of Hollywood like that? And what are they or their instrumentally inclined colleagues going to do about it? Maybe Alexander's Ragtime Band will capture the prize. It is a first-rate picture of its kind, and I lay stress on its kind. Here, too, is not enough of an original score such as Kern and Bennett, for instance, wrote for High, Wide and Handsome.

In the New Year (Maybe) . . .

NOW is the time, high time in fact, to start swinging the Academy in line with a well considered procedure which will accord a merited reward of recognition to those film musicians whose work merits such public and official acclaim. I mentioned this

fact to a Hollywood composer whose future and finance does not depend on a Felix. In the first place, he replied, too few musicians belong to the Academy, which seemed to me a pitifully ineffectual reply. Secondly, the composers of Hollywood are not organized in any sense, he continued. "There should be a guild or a club or some kind of group organization among the composers," my friend suddenly stated, shaking off the mollusk attitude into which most Hollywood musicians are driven by too much or too little work. "The music arrangers and orchestrators formed such an association last year. I think Russell Bennett of RKO is the president." And then he sank again into shell-like silence. We walked and smoked. I said nothing. He brightened up again: "Of course, quite often it would be hard to say whether a man is a composer or a music arranger. But that could be worked out," he said with an assuring smile. I saw my bus rounding the corner and bade him farewell. Maybe he had prayed for the bus to come, composers being strange creatures. "Every composer in Hollywood must appreciate your interest. I certainly do,' he said fervently. "Let's talk more about it and get some action. How about next week? . . . No, that won't do, I am going to Palm Springs over the holidays. Suppose I give you a buzz in the New Year." I yelled back from the bus step: "Suppose you did." As I laddered upstairs I heard the bus conductor say to a pretty girl: "I can't tonight. There's a union meeting.'

Hollywood's Nibelheim . . .

NIBELHEIM, it will not be necessary to explain at length, is the subterranean region in Wagner's Rhinegold, first opera of Der Ring des Nibelungen, where the skilful denizens of the early depths are held in bondage by Alberich, possessor of the allpowerful ring and of the Tarnhelm, that magic cap which enables the wearer to make himself invisible or to disguise himself in any shape large or a small, a dragon or a tiny toad. I will not go into detailed allusions as to the direction in which Wagner symbolized certain conditions in Hollywood long before he startled the world by moving scenery instead of projecting moving landscapes on a static backdrop. That museum piece of a painted and passing forest scenery still rumbles across the Parsifal stage in Bayreuth, but that is not what concerns me at the present writing. I am thinking of the various Nibelheims in the different studios, of the music departments, where arrangers and orchestrators, like the fabled minions of Alberich, likewise dig and hammer and forge (!!) things that glisten, sparkle and charm.

From Night to Light . . .

A YEAR ago the subjects of the different Alberich's met to discuss some of their professional problems. Instead of the handful of widely known ar-

BEEFFEE

ALBERT LEWIN

Producer

UNDER CONTRACT TO PARAMOUNT

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With

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Christmas Greetings

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rangers who took the initiative, now some ninety of the best arrangers and orchestrators come together once a month and "talk shop" for the good of themselves and of films. While this issue is on the press, ASMA, or the American Society of Music Arrangers, will have held its first anniversary banquet at Levy's. Russell Bennett, president; Adolph Deutsch, first vice-president; Hugo Fridthofer, second vice - president; John Leipold, secretary - treasurer. The executive committee is: Leigh Harline. Felix Mills, Gordon Jenkins, Leonid Raab, David Raksen, Charles Wolcott and Edmund Ross. Actually what ASMA means today, if I gauge things aright, is that the former serfs of musical Alberichs are weary of working in the dark. They too cherish the sunlight, or at least the Kleigs of justified acknowledgment of their art. The ASMAites are tired of being regarded as obscure hacks and handy-men. They rightly consider themselves as dignified music artists who make a large and vital contribution to the progress and prosperity of filmdom.

More Regarding ASMA . . .

RRANGING has occasionally suffered from a lack $oldsymbol{A}$ of dignity due to a misconception as to what this musical craft requires and implies. It is a dignified musical occupation, the irony of the course of things often making musical dignitaries out of those who would not exist but for the helpful, loyal, ingenuous labors of self-effacing arrangers and orchestrators. But the ASMAites are less concerned with the dignity of their calling, than with advancing quality and working standards. There are qualifications for membership. For one thing, a potential ASMA member must have been making his living as an arranger for at least one year. Moreover he must be recommended by three members in good standing. It is a national association, although most members reside here. Frank Black, for instance, is a member of the New York group, or chapter. ASMAites of Hollywood meet once a month to discuss screen and radio problems, price lists, individual situations which require careful treatment because of certain difficult and problematic circumstances, conditions not being the same at any two film or radio studios.

Constructive Demands . . .

VENTUALLY ASMA will have a standing in the world of screen and music such as the highly esteemed association of cinematographers or the American Guild of Organists. One step in that direction is the formulation of demands for uniform screen credits to all members of ASMA. Rules are being worked out under what conditions and for what reason screen credit shall go to one or more arrangers, in case several men have been employed on one score. Another constructive scheme is in the hands of another committee in order to have good courses in orchestrating and arranging offered at schools and colleges. ASMA will have to do a good deal of pioneering in that direction, because some of the so-called orchestration courses, while given by most earnest persons, are hardly what they should

be. This is perhaps due to the fact that it is difficult to tell orchestration from composition. No one can really orchestrate unless he can compose. It so happens that numerous composers cannot orchestrate, literally as well as qualitatively speaking. Some people consider an arranger or orchestrator as little different from a copyist, but that is an entirely ignorant conception of what arranging and orchestrating imply.

Credit Where It Is Due . . .

WHAT ASMA proposes now I have suggested already in these pages, because it seems only right that credit should go where credit is due, in terms of honor and compensation. In Europe music arrangers share in royalties—one-sixth, I believe—while the composer receives one-third. This appears only fair, considering that arranging today demands creative ability in the fullest sense of the word. Composers expect arrangers and orchestrators to provide ideas which will give a tune additional character and verve or whatever expression the dramatic situation requires. The arranger must think in terms of the composer and yet consider also orchestrations from every practical standpoint of stage, microphone, cost and performance possibilities. He cannot make a poor tune into a good one, but if he has ability and ingenuity as well as technique as a composer, he can surround an average tune with effects of instrumental, choral or general thematic-rhythmic treatment which make that tune something far more effective than it was originally. The arranger hence must be a diagnostician and a creator. To paraphrase an old musical joke, he must be able to match inspiration with perspiration to give a tune full form and force.

Music Subtle and Beautiful . . .

T LEAST once more I shall go to the Esquire A Theatre to South Riding, because musically, too, this is an exemplary production. I wish to draw attention, for instance, to the finely introductory main title music. "This is England; this is English soil," it seems to say, "the possession of which is a holy trust," as the foreman of the neglected estate tells his master. There is a great love of England in that folklike tune brought in without artifice. I was pleasantly aware also of the way in which music commences and ends between unaccompanied scenes. There is a scene when the husband looks at the portrait of his wife who is among the "living dead" of an asylum. Just before the screen flashes back to a scene of years ago, when they fell in love at a dance, the music sets in with a glissando uprise as if someone were taking the beholder by the arm and turning him around to obscure another picture. The railroad scene, again while not novel of device, was well handled in growing tension. Altogether a fine and well recorded score, composed by Richard Addinsell and directed by Muir Mathieson. Incidentally, there is music of an ideal kind also in the speaking voices.

A friend will be pleased with a Christmas pressent in the form of a subscription to the Hollywood Spectator.

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Merry Christmas to Mr. Beaton and all the other nice people who make the Spectator such a fine paper—

JUDY GARLAND

MY MOTION PICTURE YEAR

By Bert Harlen

EACH of us has his motion picture year, the sum of what the screen has contributed to his mental and emotional life during that period. How great this contribution is few of us realize unless we take stock by reviewing the impressions received in picture theatres over this lengthy span of time. Reminiscence will reveal that many of our most stimulating experiences have come vicariously from the screen—in some lives, most of the moments of beauty or excitement. It is well, then, for one to let his thoughts dwell over these impressions at the close of the year, in order that he can fully appreciate what he owes to the motion picture, as well as to consider what the motion picture might have given him which it has not. Editor Beaton has asked me, as my contribution to the Christmas edition, merely to let my thoughts drift back over the memorable pictures, performances, and exhibitions of technical skill which I have seen during the year, without referring to past editions of the Spectator or other sources. This I propose to do.

Reverie Will Write It . . .

THE result will not be at all a listing of everything shown during the year which I believe artistically significant. Writing without a guide, it is possible, due to the tendencies of my individual psyche, that some impressions may crowd in and obscure the recollection of worthier accomplishments. Then too, though I have seen a good many pictures during the past months, kismet has decreed against my seeing several of the outstanding ones. And yet, the reminiscence will be a sort of criticism, for will not the vividness and persistency with which impressions surge into my thoughts be at least indicative of artistic worth in the original stimulus? At any rate, I shall write of my motion picture memories over the past year, and it is to be hoped that the process will kindle pleasant sparks of remembrance for the reader. The spell of reverie is fast subjecting me. Flow, my thoughts!

Modern Legend Established . . .

DOWN a ray of memory parade a winsome, rosycheeked maiden and seven pudgy little dwarfs, trailed by a handsome prince. During the early months of the year these characters and their adventures, lifted from a medieval tale and re-created by a new art, became a modern American legend, fixed and important in the minds of millions of little boys and girls, and viewed with affection by other millions of adults. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. One of the most vivid instances of story-telling of all time. And when motion pictures in general are suffering from the blight of sterility, brought about through the over-use of the mechanical voice, this simple tale points out again the inherent power of visual images on the screen. . . For no discernible reason a swash-

buckling fellow with a cocked hat and lengthy pistol stalks into my mind—Fredric March in the Buccaneer. Is it because I watched them shooting it one afternoon, or because of the vigor of the performance? Reviewers were not unanimously kind, I recall. But I wonder if, with our constant use of realism as a criterion of excellence, we do not lose sight of what color and charm can lie in a bit of sheer theatricality? . . . Trickling fillets of water come, springing from the earth and growing, growing in expanse and force until they become the dynamic, fierce torrents of the Mississippi at flood time, the whole accompanied by finely imaginative music. I remember now, I saw it the same night—The River, splendid documentary, written and directed by Pare Lorentz.

Faces and Places Go On . . .

DETTE DAVIS, in white crinoline, sits on the **B** steps of a mansion, turns her head for a moment, and I see her eyes flash with hot anger. She is leading the negro slaves in, "Come, you chil'un, come along." Only once does her smouldering fury escape its repression, on one explosive, discordant note of the song. A fine instance of emotional fire on the screen. Jezebel. . . . The countenance of Mickey Rooney pokes itself through the other impressions, now here now there, convulsed with laughter or woefully perplexed or naively saddened. But each appearance is an extraordinarily expressive cinematic study, the lines of the features and hair forming endlessly varied, intricate, revealing patterns. . . . Robin Hood leaps into view and strikes a stance, vibrant, elemental, free. Errol Flynn, of course. . . . The wind roars, tall trees bend, and great whitecaps dash on the shore—all from a symbolic montage in Storm In a Teacup, English picture, in spots falling below the American standard of technical finesse, but illustrating more forcibly than any picture I have ever seen, the power of the motion picture to arouse indignation and a passion for retribution. The simple, pacific citizenry of a small Scotch town at last rise up against a bigoted, unjust political lord. . . . The tragic head of Beethoven looms, portending the many fine persons and ideas the screen will some day tell us of. Already the accomplished actor's name escapes me. Fleeting is fame. Well, I shall not look

Of Thoroughly Developed Situations . . .

JAMES STEWART and the vivacious Ginger Rogers stand together in an equipment room of a college science laboratory, escaping momentarily from a hostile world and saying more with their eyes than could be put into words; indeed, more than Mr. Hays would allow to be put into words. George Stevens' Vivacious Lady is not only an excellent demonstration of the use of the camera to achieve intimacy with characters, but it also is a prize example



WESLEY RUGGLES





ROY DEL RUTH

Director

UNDER CONTRACT TO 20TH CENTURY-FOX

BEEFFEE

of the value of thoroughly developing situations. In most pictures only the pivotal points of a situation are dealt with, and then it is dismissed. In this picture every situation was nursed for all it was worth. . . . A grief stricken woman in a trailing black cape falters toward the door of the home into which her lover has just been carried, dead. It is closed in her face by a stern woman, his mother. The sobs of the other strike pity to the heart; she achieves a truly tragic mood. Luise Rainer just missed giving an outstanding performance of the year in The Toy Wife, and this was largely because the picture itself missed fire. I felt it was an essentially good story, too. "There is many a slip, et cetera." Rainer, however, is one of the few really fine actresses in Hollywood.

Faulty Picture Creeps In ...

NOTABLE mood and dramatic punch were contained in John Cromwell's Algiers, and an idea or two. Charles Boyer, walking, walking steadily and resolutely to the capture that waits for him outside his refuge; Hedy Lamar, listless, fascinating; Sigrid Gurie, much a woman in love; Joseph Calleia, subtle; Gene Lockhart in his gripping death scene—these come to mind. . . . A young woman who has done outstanding work as a dramatic actress arrives on the scene pulling an untamed leopard along at the end of a rope, and generally working hard at being funny. Ah, yes, Bringing Up Baby. I remember it well because, to my knowledge, I was the only critic on the coast who put it on the "pan." The director called the office, there was considerable hullabaloo and I was viewed with askance on all sides. I still think I was right. . . . The whole crew of You Can't Take It With You joins the cavalcade. What needs to be said? Except that the public clearly demonstrates once again it will go for pictures which are about something.

An Unknown Appears . . .

IENIE on ice, one of the most beautiful spectacles $m{n}$ to be brought to the screen. Rhythm is one of the chief elements of the motion picture art, but we are given so little of it. . . . A wizened old lady shuffles into sight, a cockney woman with the scars of much living on her face, but bristling with the will for more life. Don't know her name; the world will probably never hear of her. But she is in the cavalcade. I believe she did a bit in a Mr. Moto film. . . . A stately, proud people appear, all uniformly seven feet or more in height, brought to our civilization by the camera from another world in the heart of Africa. Part of the extraordinary pictorial journalism in Dark Rapture. . . . Lovely girls dance about tall Grecian pillars, set against a background which is too blue. And cinematically unpersonable opera singers warble. An admirable but somewhat ill-considered endeavor to bring something more beautiful to the screen. . . . A tune floats by—Thanks for the Memories. And I have visions of several million fumbling, lonely, sentimental people letting it serve as their expression as they hum it accompanied by whining pianos in cocktail bars all over the country. . . .

Beautiful strains flood in recalling the scores for The Great Waltz and Girl of the Golden West.

Our Thoughts Shift . . .

BUT the lulling music has allowed a shift of thought. Vast generalities blow in, like gusts, putting to flight memories of performances and camera work and direction, which I can only glimpse as they fly past—Four Daughters, with the excellent John Garfield; the camera hovering over Margaret Sullavan's bed like the angel of death in Three Comrades; the revived Count of Monte Cristo; effervescent Shirley Temple in Little Miss Broadway; Shopworn Angel; Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse; King of Alcatraz; If I Were King—all are gone. Rushing in are trends, trends. Hollywood continues to demonstrate an awakening social sense, though demonstrations are yet made only for the sake of box-office returns. Many social problems are touched upon, though, and in Blockade we have the first hesitant effort to deal with an international problem, ignorant abuse of authority in Europe and the destruction it brings to thousands of innocent, bewildered people. ... The Citadel from England marks another milestone in motion picture advance. . . . The film capital turns in upon itself and inspects its own processes in several trenchant satires. On occasion there is even bitterness in the writing. A young man walks by. He is on a studio lot, I see. Yes, I recall now, some minor employee. A person in a group which he passes says, "He's nobody." Crude, obvious writing, but reflecting an awareness of the distorted values which do exist in Hollywood. In most of such stories the producers are pictured as bumptious Wonder why they permit such defaming propaganda to issue from their own studios? . . . The March of Time has contributed important picture journalism dealing with the wars and other matters. . . . A Hollywood preview audience hisses a famous woman correspondent when she is shown in a newsreel attending a premiere. Once she had czarlike influence in the film capital. The old order is changing. . . . Yes, Hollywood is slowly developing an awareness-of its virtues, shortcomings, potentialities, social responsibility. What might we not expect in the future? Ah, but now we are into speculation, and speculation is endless—unless one puts an end to it.

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of

MABEL KEEFER

AN OBSESSION has taken possession of me. It is to see the Brownies—brain children of Palmer Cox—which were featured in a well known magazine many years ago, on the screen. What delightful animated cartoons could be made with them, and what rollicking, infectious music could be written to accompany their mirthful antics. Irish music for the little Irishman; Indian music for the little Indian; early American for Uncle Sam, but what kind of music should we have for the policeman and the dude? And all the others? Oh, well, I shall have that figured out by the time some producer gets ready to use them.

MY HEARTY dislike of the word "sophisticate" and all that it implies has been well aired in this column. Picture, then, my great satisfaction when, reading a recent magazine article written by a member of the younger generation, I found these words: "A few years ago, when it was smart to be sophisticated . . ." I chortled with glee. Film industry, please take notice. Not of my chortling, but of the fact that "sophisticates" are now considered old-fashioned.

JUDGING from comments I have heard, Richard Hageman's fine musical score for If I Were King is fully appreciated. And I fancy the musical direction of Boris Morros has somewhat to do with this.

UCIUS BEEBE, in his "Stage Asides," in the L New York Herald Tribune, says: "The business of chronicling in film form the somewhat diffused and more than somewhat chi-chi existence that has come to be known as 'cafe society'. . . . " That expression, "chi-chi," has me stymied-nonplused, as it were. I must get to New York more often. But I do know what Mr. Beebe means when he says that "Hollywood tracks down every conceivable detail of atmosphere, informs itself precisely and accurately of each and every circumstance surrounding the midst under discussion, then goes right ahead and guilds its films the way its customers and clients want it done. Or as Hollywood supposes its customers and clients want it done. It has never in recent years occurred to more than one film producer in a thousand that taste is created in the image of the screen's version of authenticity and that even veracity might be made palatable should the screen decide it was a good thing." (The italics are mine, not Mr. Beebe's.)

0 NCE again MGM has given us good medicine. And I mean medicine. The therapeutic value of the Strauss music in The Great Waltz will reach all

*

the way to the box-office. Perhaps not for *The Great Waltz* in particular, but surely for motion pictures in general.

STILL am hoping for theatre lobby posters giving the names of the cast and the characters they play. It would save running time, and be so much appreciated by those of us who like to check on the players after we have seen a picture.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune magazine, This Week, prints a piece by Samuel Duff McCoy, "For the Undying March With You." At the end, Mr. McCoy says: "Some of their folks live in cities . . . with a whole family crowded into one room; and a man comes home to this room one night, without a job, and stares at his wife and the kids and wonders how he will pay the rent and what the kids will have to eat tomorrow. . . . And just then one of our fellows, a young fellow named Walt, for instance, will come along, whistling a song . . . a song, for instance, like 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' Tra-la-lala-la! And the man hears it and grins-in spite of himself-and gets up and says, 'Oh, what the hell-I'll go out and find something tomorrow. Walt, you and I are going places!' Now, if I were the sort of person who says "I told you so-" but, of course, I am not. Only there is a sermon for the film industry in those words.

AN EXAMPLE of Spectator service: After the severe snowstorm at Thanksgiving time, an office associate and I were discussing climates. We discovered that we knew nothing about the trees in warm climates—that is, which shed their leaves in the autumn, and which, if any, stayed green the year round. A few days later along came the Spectator, with Editor Beaton giving some information on the subject in his Mental Meanderings.

OVERHEARD on a bus: "Yeah, I guess it was a pretty good picture, but, oh, I d'know—I can't stand them double features! I just can't set through 'em!"

B. R. CRISLER of The New York Times, quotes Howard Dietz as suggesting "a continuing advertising campaign for the industry to be undertaken after at least six months of research with a view to establishing a psychological basis for a continuous good-will campaign somewhat in the manner of the utilities industries." Mr. Crisler's comment is: "What a sentence, and from a man who used to write such pretty lyrics too!" As for me—I don't get it! Why a psychological basis for a good-will campaign? Why not a psychological basis for producing motion pictures?

CLISHMACLAVER (Scottish word for idle talk): A song came over the radio done by what is called, I believe. a "torch singer." I thought, what a horrible song! The next evening, listening to Kenny

Baker singing what I considered to be a very pleasing song, I suddenly realized that it was the "horrible" song I had heard the night before. . . . Why the trend toward cluttered advertising in the magazines? As a potential buyer, it discourages me—which isn't exactly what advertising is for, is it?

AN OLD German proverb: "There is no why without a because." Present-day Germany is one great big BECAUSE, with why entirely forgotten.

ADD exquisite musical moments: The shepherds making music with their horns, in the Vienna Woods sequence of The Great Waltz.

REVIEWS

(Continued from page 25)

writer, adapting the smooth, easy fiction of the author to the needs of the camera.

Production Excellent . . .

NOWHERE does Associate Producer Edward T. Lowe's evident care show more than in the casting. He practically went back to the Mississippi country for his types—or so it seemed. Clem Bevans as "Turkeyneck" Slocum, the rural sheriff, was born to the part. Raymond Hatton as Judge Tyler again displays an acumen for character acting that cannot fail to gain recognition. Porter Hall, as kindly Uncle Silas, adds another to a long list of outstanding performances. He is easily one of Hollywood's finest character actors. William Haade, a newcomer to this reviewer, essayed a dual role with consummate skill. His two-part characterization called for portraits of a rural goof and a slick urban crook. His work stood out. Philip Warren, as the romantic interest, and Janet Waldo, as the object of his affections, show promise of better things to come. Edward Pawley, as the picture's heavy, is an old favorite and portrayed the no-good squire exactly as Twain must have wanted him characterized. The kids, Billy Cook as Tom Sawyer, and Donald O'Connor as his rascally side-kick, were both natural and convincing. The two boys did some fine trouping; especially in the graveyard scene and the final courtroom scene did their work stand out. Praise for Etta McDaniel and Oscar Smith in two comedy roles well done.

Background Authentic . . .

THERE seemed nothing haphazard about the production. The picture of rural Arkansas seemed entirely authentic. Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick captured the spirit of the frontier in the construction of their small river-bank town. The picnic sequences were especially well handled, as was the courtroom sequence. Tom Sawyer, Detective is a grand picture by any estimate. A "sleeper" I guess they call these, when no flourish or fanfare precedes their arrival, and when the exhibitor is not primed to expect anything. It has all the ingredients of a successful picture.



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MISSION OF SCREEN ART

(This is the third in a series of special articles by the Editor dealing with the fundamentals of screen art.)

ONE objective all fine arts have in common is the suggestion of reality. But it is the mission of none to recreate nature. The mission of Art is to interpret nature; the mission of each artist to interpret it in terms of the medium in which he works. When I stood one day before the statue of Aphrodite in the museum in Naples, I marveled at the fidelity with which the sculptor had chiselled marble away until a perfect human form was left; but, working in such a cold and rigid medium, it was beyond the skill of the artist to create in me the illusion that I was looking at a living woman. My response to the effort of the sculptor was intellectual appreciation of his skill. It thus was the artist, not the creation, that I admired, even though it was the degree of perfection the creation achieved that was the measure of my admiration for the creator. When I visited the Louvre in Paris, I would have been embarrassed and pained if my absorption in the Venus de Milo had given me the illusion that I was looking at a real woman who had no arms and almost no clothes. My favorite landscape hangs in the National Gallery, London. It is Constable's Hay Wain. It is not even the artist's best, but it appeals to me. I have sat in front of it for a total of hours. In the center foreground is a mud puddle. If the artist's skill had been great enough to give me the illusion that I was looking at a real mud puddle, I would not have spent five minutes in front of the picture, for I never yet have seen a mud puddle I cared to contemplate for even a fraction of that time.

Exercise of Picture Sense . . .

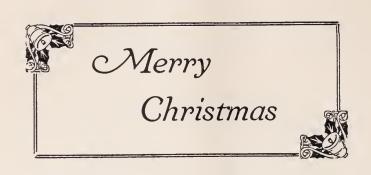
PROBABLY the most arresting portrait I have seen is Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*, which hangs in the Huntington Library. It is a work of art the whole world praises, yet if the boy stepped from the frame and attended a costume ball, he would attract no particular attention if there were other costumes that shared the period of his. The aural arts—symphonic music, the opera, and the drama—are either subjectively or objectively visual. The layman who lacks knowledge of the technique of symphonic composition can derive full enjoyment from an orchestra's playing of a symphony only by the exercise of his picturing sense to see the story the music tells. Opera and the drama become enjoyable only when the visual and aural senses function in sympathy with what is offered them. Sculpture and painting are wholly visual, yet they share with the other arts the obligation to suggest movement, life, energy; to make us see them as their creators saw them, to grasp the stories their creators strove to have them tell. All arts are story-telling mediums. Art was born when prehistoric man scratched symbols on the faces of cliffs, and antiquarians interpret for us the stories the primitive artist recorded in his drawings; and down through the ages, through the period of Greek pantomime, past the birth of printing, until today, authors, dramatists, sculptors, painters, composers, poets have been telling the world stories, each in the language of his individual art.

Confined Within Limits . . .

 $\mathbf{D}UT$ it was beyond the power of any of them to Dcreate a perfect illusion of reality, an illusion so perfect we saw only the art object apart from the artist, saw Aphrodite as a woman and Blue Boy as a boy. All the arts strove to entertain us, but none succeeded in providing universal entertainment, in developing a language all could understand. Each had its audience composed of those who either instinctively or by training could follow the stories they told; but all lacked the simplicity of expression which dismissed the intellect as a factor in their understanding and appreciation. All of them, in their various degrees, were mental exercises, and not until mentalities attained a common level could all of them appeal equally to all mentalities. Common to all the arts was their difficulty in creating a perfect illusion of reality. Arts derive their strength from their limitations, from being compelled to stay within limits arbitrarily set by their mechanics. The painter could suggest movement in the leaves on a tree bending in a storm, but it was beyond the power of his brush to make the suggestion so strong the viewer of the painting could imagine the leaves were moving. Thus it was that the "movement" we credited a painting with possessing was provided by our imaginations accepting sympathetically the suggestion expressed in the language of the painter's technique.

Birth of the Motion Picture . . .

VER a century ago the seeds of a new art were U germinating in the restless brains of blazers of odd and unmapped trails. Men were endeavoring to create an illusion of motion by wedding persistence of vision and successively projected still pictures. Munsterberg tells us of Farady, who in 1831 wrote on "a peculiar class of optical deceptions." In 1832 in both Germany and France devices were designed "by which pictures of objects in various phases of movement gave the impression of continued motion." The United States enters the prenatal story of the motion picture in 1872, when Muybridge, a Californian, photographed a trotting horse with twentyfour cameras, the shutters of which were opened successively by the horse himself, his feet as he moved forward breaking strings stretched across the track. And that is all we did to make the motion picture possible until Eastman removed the difficulty blocking the progress of the various European experiments. To those experiments we owe credit for the motion picture of today, for the principles then established are those which govern the showing of pictures now. All the European pioneers needed to make the opera-



EDWARD G. ROBINSON

With Best Wishes

WARNER BAXTER

tion of their devices practical, was some substitute for the glass plates they were forced to use in their photographic process and which made difficult the projection of their images with sufficient speed to create the impression of continuous motion. Eastman's film solved that problem and was America's only important contribution to a machine which founded an art.

Perfect Illusion of Reality . . .

ALL the early progress of the art also was made in Europe. The progress continued until the World War checked it, up to which time American product suffered in comparison with what came to us from abroad. The war shifted the chief activity to this country where the business of making motion pictures became great, but the art languished, due to the failure of those who controlled it to realize its existence, a display of lack of intelligence which still persists. It was then, and still is, regarded strictly as a business. It was the motion picture camera which gave the world its most graphic art, the one which possessed the power all others lacked, the power to create a perfect illusion of reality. It established complete unity of its elements. Its people were of the same substance as its settings, its drama enacted by photographs in photographed surroundings. It was beyond its power to introduce an element to disturb our complete acceptance of it as real. It is the only art which can show us yesterday's civilization (King of Kings) and tomorrow's (Things to Come), and make both live before our eyes-which can make us look into the living eyes of Pontius Pilate and those of a despot not yet born-which can do such things and make us believe them.

When Company Is Congenial . . .

DROP into a friend's house some evening and find there a few other people you like. Sit in front of the fire and discuss the inconsequential happenings in the lives of those about you—the reason for Susie's change of dressmakers; the funny experience Jack had one evening at the Rutherfords; the straight flush Bob drew against four treys and a full; the letter from Aunt Agatha who is doing Europe; the best place to buy shoes; the changes you are going to make in your garden in the spring; why Mabel shifted all the furniture in the living room; the latest book Edith has read—an evening like thousands you have had and found enjoyable. And why do you find such evenings enjoyable? Because you like your companions. Because the gathering is intimate, human, real. Because it is relaxation which makes no tiring demands on your mentality. Because it is pleasant entertainment. Because the mood of the gathering is agreeable.

Into Its Inner World . . .

MOOD comparable with that of the gathering in your friend's house can be developed in the mind of an audience by what is presented on the screen. We start with a mood receptive to the advances of the motion picture; we are there for the sole purpose of enjoying ourselves, and we respond readily to the

Merry Christmas



Kathleen and Gene Lockhart

TRAKTIKT

Season's Greetings from

A Friend

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My Christmas Greetings
to Mr. Beaton and the
Spectator Staff
HENRY KOSTER

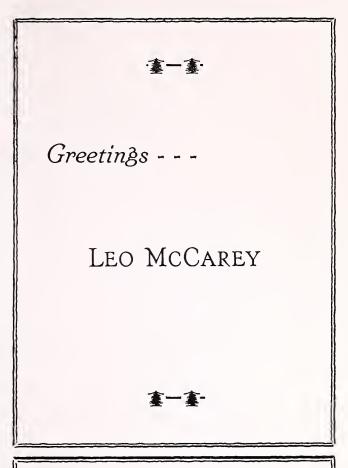
first bid for our interest in what we see, are willing to accept the characters as people we know and extend our liking to those who reach for it. The camera takes us into intimate contact with the story people; we live among them and move along with them to the story's end. We become so intimate with all of them, we are entertained even when Arthur tells who makes his shirts. Only by the completeness of the illusion of reality created by the camera can we completely share the mood of what is presented on the screen. Unless we feel what we are looking at is real, the film offering cannot entertain us. We cannot be entertained by shadows without substance, by photographs moving on a twodimensional plane. When our mood is receptive to what is offered us, we see the photographs as real people moving in a world to which we ascribe height, breadth and depth, the same three-dimensional world in which we ourselves move. In other words, the art creation takes us out of the outer world of our material interests and places us in its own inner world. It does not try to entertain us; it takes us past the barrier between fact and fancy and allows us to entertain ourselves.

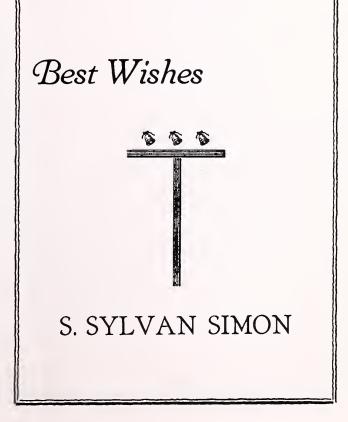
Mood Is Box-Office . . .

BEAR in mind always that we are discussing motion pictures, not talkies; screen art, not photographed stage technique. I am not one of those who accept the Hollywood view that the story is the element of chief importance and that its telling, no matter how -whether in dialogue or with pictures-is the thing that counts. The establishment and preservation of mood is the paramount interest. It is the mood of the gathering in our friend's house that makes us interested in the reason why Mabel rearranged the furnishing of her living room, in itself a trivial thing, but of consequence because it concerns one we like. It is the mood which gives pictures their box-office value. When the screen was silent, it lacked the mechanical means to disturb the illusion of reality by embracing reality as an integral element. It kept the police siren in its place as an illusive element in a world of illusion. If our imaginations were capable of preserving it, then surely our imaginations were capable of preserving the unity of the scene, of keeping intact the illusion of reality, by making our ears hear the siren's sound. If, even in a talkie, we do not accept the photograph as an officer, the scene means nothing to us, has no power to entertain us. Making the policeman a fancy and the siren's blast a fact, is a mixture of warring elements, an anomaly which derides screen art.

Reason for Commercial Success...

BUT Hollywood laughs when you mention screen art. To it, making screen entertainment is strictly a business, as I have said. The business, however, is not being conducted by capable businessmen. The capable businessman shapes his product to conform to the demand of the market; his sole concern is to offer his customers what they will buy most readily, not to dictate to them what they shall buy. Holly-





John W. Considine, Jr.

Producer

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer



wood does all the things the capable businessman carefully avoids doing; but it does them unconsciously. Never having understood why the public bought screen entertainment in the first place, being unaware of the element which made it marketable, it now, without knowing it, is trying to make over the market to conform to its product instead of studying the market to the end that it may give it what it will buy most readily. Obviously the impression of movement the screen conveys to its audience is the chief factor in its commercial success. That the impression is due to the rapid projection of a series of pictures, in which there is no movement, is of no concern to the audience; it is none the less movement to the eye, even though it is the product of persistence of vision making an impression appear as an actuality. Our artist who painted the tree leaning before the wind, can inspire imagination to ascribe movement to the leaves, but only the screen can show us the leaves actually trembling, can create in us the illusion that the photographed leaves have movement.

Filmic and Physical Motion . . .

WITH that as the starting point in their analysis of their product, one would think producers of screen entertainment would grasp the commercial wisdom of providing their market with as much movement as possible. In a screen offering there are two kinds of movement, physical and filmic, or objective and subjective. Of the two, filmic motion is the more important—if we differentiate them—as in reality physical motion is a part of filmic motion, the motion which makes the story interest continuous, which provides the maximum of entertainment in a given length of film. It is its entertainment content which determines the market value of a screen creation, consequently the first concern of the makers of pictures should be to keep intact the element upon which their commercial success depends. Even though it embraces it, filmic motion is not dependent for its integrity upon physical motion. A motion picture is a symphony of movement, our emotions the strings upon which it is played. Our emotions provide the continuity. They follow the physical action of a lost hunter in seeking desperately to reach a height from which he hopes to get his bearings, but when he attains the height, stands still and gazes anxiously into the distance, only his eyes alive, our emotions do not pause as his physical action ceases. Our anxiety for his safety increases, for the crucial point has been reached; we know each hour is precious, that delay means peril to him and his sweetheart whom he must reach before disaster overtakes her. We, so to speak, are as rigid as he is as he scans the valley beneath him; and our hearts leap with his as he spies a path leading down.

Power of Illusion . . .

OUR emotions keep the filmic motion intact. Our brain tells us the hunter is in no danger, that he is an actor pretending to be a hunter, that there is a camera crew close to him, that soon he will be in a comfortable motor on his way home; that his sweetCompliments of the Season

CRANE WILBUR





My Best Wishes The Spectator

JAMES STEWART



THE SEASON'S GREETINGS



ROBERT SISK
Producing for RKO-Radio

heart is not his sweetheart, is in no danger, probably is at home, entertaining friends at tea. But so completely has the illusion of reality been created, so sympathetically have our emotions responded to its urge, we give no heed to the realities our cold brain tries to force upon our attention; we ignore its efforts to lead us from the inner world of the screen creation into the outer world of our daily, commonplace, routine actualities. It will be seen, then, that if a motion picture does not create an illusion of reality, it creates nothing; if it does not weave its elements into a continuous flow of filmic motion to keep our emotional reaction unchecked-in short, if it is not screen art-it cannot have entertainment value to assure its success at the box-office. And, as pointed out in a previous Spectator, these discussions are based on commercial considerations, on picture-making as a business, and screen art becomes a factor in them because, as the business is one of manufacturing and marketing art creations, it should follow that the degree of artistic perfection the creations attain must be reflected in the financial return they earn.

Interest Must Be Continuous . . .

WE HAVE seen that the degree of merit a motion picture attains is determined by the degree in which the illusion of reality is developed and sustained. Obviously, the most disturbing factor in the integrity of an illusion must be the intrusion of reality. Another is the disturbance of the pictorial symphony's harmony by one element's bid for attention on its own account and at the expense of the rhythmic flow of the filmic motion. Let us first consider the one we place second. To be complete, our interest in a screen offering must be continuous. If into a scene which has been a legitimate element in the forward flow of filmic motion, comes a woman wearing a hat so striking it attracts attention to itself apart from the remainder of the composition, we have an abrupt check to the filmic motion and a letdown in audience interest by the intrusion of alien considerations. Where, in heaven's name, did she get such a hat? Does she imagine she looks well in it? Or-what a stunning hat! I wonder who designed it. I will get one like it. Multiply the hat by hairdresses, gowns, sets, all sufficiently striking to attract

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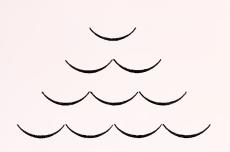
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Greetings
From
Two Friends

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attention to themselves, and you find many cases of pictures being deprived of their maximum entertainment possibilities by a lack of understanding of their true inwardness on the part of those who make them.

Dialogue An Anomaly . . .

THE gravest intrusion is that of the reality of audible dialogue and mechanically reproduced sounds in this art of the illusion of reality. As we consider it, however, we must remember we are regarding the art from the standpoint of the business interest of those who control it. Anyone with even the most rudimentary knowledge of the fundamentals of the art, is aware audible dialogue is a rank anomaly a poison which would kill any art which lacks the great inherent strength screen art possesses. But a little dose of it can act as a stimulant to the forward progress of a screen story; the public will accept it, and is it good business expensively to strive for perfection when the public will be content with something less? When it is put in that way, we must accord dialogue a rightful place in screen entertainment even though we do not recognize it as a legitimate element of screen art. But the talkie is not moderate in its use of dialogue, and equally immoderate is it with mechanically created sounds. Instead of using its vocal powers merely to expedite the progress of a story by enabling it to cut corners, and recognizing the right of the art to play the most important part in the story telling, the talkie goes to the extreme length of murdering the art and presenting its remains for our entertainment. Previously we have established the fact that audible dialogue harms motion pictures by making their appeal intellectual instead of emotional, as it should be. Here we find it does further harm by virtue of its being an intrusion of reality in an art whose strength as entertainment its derived solely from its status as an art of the illusion of reality.

(In the next Spectator we will discuss the screen as a business.)

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Feliz Navidad

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Spectator

LEO CARRILLO



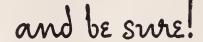


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Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—January 7, 1939

Vol.13-No. 25

Is Paying for Its Unpopularity

Hollywood's Publicity Deals So Largely With Glamour and Money, Rest of the World Is Envious

Picture Cost and Entertainment

"A Man To Remember" Prompts Eastern
Commentator to Make Some
Pertinent Remarks

Becoming a Consumers' Cinema

Robert Joseph Discusses Sterility of Screen's Story Material and Its Effect on the Public

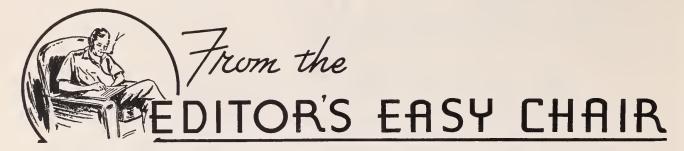
. . . REVIEWS . . .

TRADE WINDS ★ THE GIRL DOWNSTAIRS ★ ZAZA ★ PACIFIC LINER

TOPPER TAKES A TRIP ★ STAND UP AND FIGHT

THEY MADE ME A CRIMINAL

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LAGUNA BEACH, New Year's Day, 1939.— Usually the first Spectator of a new year starts off with the editor's selection of the best pictures of the previous year. This one will not because, at the moment, I am sitting on the beach down here with my mind on such friendly terms with my inclinations it refuses to do more than permit me to write these few lines to explain why I do not compile my list of pictures. The stuff which follows this under the Easy Chair heading was written some time ago; when the Christmas number was being "put to bed," I caught two previews for this issue, then Mrs. Spectator and I lit out. It was tired. You did not notice it, but in the Christmas number there were no less than twenty thousand words of my writing, and that is enough to entitle a fellow to a holiday. I had intended making my "best pictures" selections while away and sending them in for this issue, but there are so many things down here for me to attend to there is no time left for writing. One of them is to develope the art of doing nothing, and that takes up a lot of time. Another is to feed the sea-gulls, and that requires the development of the art of throwing pieces of bread into the air to permit the gulls to get them on the fly. There is at least one swim each day, as well as two or three naps. And my pipes have to be smoked, the beach combed for firewood, the surf studied. For instance, I have learned that the combers which carry the most imposing crests and make the most noise, do not get farthest up the beach. Life is like that, and so far that is the extent of my Laguna thinking. I hope to have my picture selections ready for the next Spectator, but at present my mental relaxation is too complete to make it a promise that can be relied upon. . . . Two seals are cavorting off the beach. I must devote my full attention to them.

INDUSTRY IS NOT POPULAR . . .

PAPERS have it that the Screen Actors' Guild may try to do something in the way of getting more reasonable treatment for its members from whom the income tax takes too much of the money they earn. There can be no question about the injustice the income tax does all creative artists working in pictures. And facts of record are the troubles of the film industry as a whole growing out of the anti-trust and other trade-practice suits pending in Federal courts. Added to all this is exhibitor discontent caused by

poor box-office earnings. An analysis of the entire situation would seem to lead to the conviction that all these troubles must spring from a common source, that however much merit each of them has, there is some underlying feeling responsible for their multiplication. All of them combined point to the fact that the industry is unpopular, that it has no friends at court. One does not have to look far to discover the reason for its unpopularity. Hollywood always has made a vulgar display of its riches, has irritated the public to the point of making itself the victim of retributive action inspired by the conscious or unconscious jealousy of those instigating it.

Hollywood Victim of Publicity . . .

MOST of the publicity Hollywood for years has been getting makes it difficult for it to go into court with clean hands. A manufacturer in St. Louis can build himself an imposing mansion without making his expenditure a subject of nation-wide publicity. A capitalist in Philadelphia can be divorced without attracting the attention of the entire country. An operator in Wall Street can make a fortune in a day without drawing undue attention to himself. But what a screen star has for breakfast is the subject of nation-wide broadcast. Sissies of both sexes write and broadcast what should be the boudoir secrets of those who work in pictures. A writer in Photoplay discusses the unmarried wives of Hollywood. I learn this from a radio broadcast which covers the nation. I have not read the article, do not know if the writer is a man or a woman, but in comparison with him or her I would classify a pimp as a respectable member of society, and I would place the magazine which prints such stuff somewhat below the moral standard of the woman who unostentatiously sells her virtue for money.

Reformation Is Needed . . .

MY GOOD friend, Jimmie Fiddler, opens and closes his entertaining broadcasts with nasty gibes at Hollywood which nullify the constructive remarks constituting the main portion of his radio talks. There is no mean streak in Jimmie; he has no grudge against Hollywood, just drifts with the prevailing tide and does his share towards adding to the film city's unpopularity. It is too much to expect that some day he will be candid enough to open a broad-

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No Cuts

cast with, "This is Jimmie Fiddler in Hollywood, where most of the radio wits are nitwits." studios cannot disclaim all responsibility for the kind of advertising Hollywood is getting. The doors of the publicity departments swing wide at the approach of the purveyors of unsavory gossip; anything which makes people talk is regarded as good publicity, no matter what the nature of it may be. Divorce of a feminine star, whether established as a fact by court action or merely the subject of a stray rumor, is choice publicity. But money, how much things cost, the size of screen incomes, the magnitude of screen stables and the gorgeousness of the screen sables—these are the choice publicity morsels which make the rest of the country envy Hollywood and which make our legislators feel justified in fixing a heavy tax burden on people who can spend money with such abandon. I fear for the success of the Actors' Guild in its efforts to get relief for its members. It is tough on justice when it is up against prejudice. I am afraid there will have to be complete reformation of Hollywood's publicity methods before there can be amelioration of the restrictions the income tax imposes on those who are victims of the harmful effect of the methods employed now.

PARSONO AND JOMMY . . .

UNIVERSAL advertising in film trade papers carried extracts from the reviews of Service de Luxe by well known critics. Two of the names credited with laudatory remarks were Louella O. Parsono and Jommy Starr. Looks to me like an attempt to inject the Italio virus in the veins of our film advertising. Devilish sly fellow, Mussolini.

EDUCATOR MAKES SUGGESTION . . .

AMONG all those in the United States giving thought to the possibilities of the educational influence of the motion picture screen, no name is better known than that of Edgar Dale, of the Bureau of Educational Research, Ohio State University. From him I have received the following letter, and heartily endorse the suggestion contained in it: "Dear Mr. Beaton: May I enlise your support in an activity which I believe is fundamentally in harmony with the splendid suggestions that you have made in the cause of peace in the columns of the Hollywood Spectator? Hollywood has made from time to time stirring documents which are extremely useful in furthering the democratic tradition in this country . . . motion pictures which voice the deepest traditions of America for freedom of speech, for racial tolerance, for peace and democracy. Unfortunately, after these motion pictures have had their run they are stored in vaults and frequently are commercially unavailable. One of these motion pictures, classified by all critics as one of the finest ever made, is The Life of Emile Zola. I believe that there is no single thing that can be done in this country to develop a better attitude and understanding of the democratic tradition than to show this motion picture. What a splendid thing it would be if Warner Brothers would see to it that

every high school boy and girl in America saw this motion picture without charge! What a challenge to the spirit of racial intolerance that seems to be growing in America! What a positive contribution it would be to our rededication to the Bill of Rights! I am enclosing a copy of a petition which we are circulating here in Columbus and elsewhere, and which we shall shortly place in the hands of Mr. Harry Warner. Cordially, Edgar Dale."

Make Plea to Harry Warner . . .

THE petition which Mr. Warner received, reads as follows: "Dear Mr. Warner: In these days when freedom of expression is being threatened, it occurred to us that in the interests of freedom of speech and racial tolerance, you might make a contribution to democracy that would be an enduring monument to the name of Warner and also a tribute to the cause of enduring patriotism. We are suggesting that you make The Life of Emile Zola available free to exhibitors to show free to high school boys and girls of America—to be shown at hours when the theatre is not in use commercially. In addition to this, we suggest that you make it available for study in classes on 16mm films. There are more than 300 sound projectors in schools in Ohio. What a boon it would be for democratic tradition if the high school children could see The Life of Emile Zola again and again.''

ECONOMY AND ENTERTAINMENT . . .

WITH the foreign film market shot to pieces, the cries for economy in production echoes along the corridors of studio administration buildings. It always has been the conviction of the makers of our pictures that the entertainment quality of a production rose in ratio with the amount of money spent on it, that one costing one million dollars must of necessity be twice as entertaining as one costing half as much. In a recent Spectator I mentioned A Man to Remember as being one of the finest examples of screen entertainment I have seen. Katharine Best, writing in Stage (New York), makes some interesting comments: "It may not strike you as a particularly impressive coincidence that a current film called Men With Wings cost \$2,000,000 to produce and another entitled A Man to Remember cost \$200,000*. It may not strike you at all, but between those two figures lie Hollywood's great flaw and its great salvation—its flagrant, expensive attitude toward spectacle, and its thrilling and unexpected little excursions into simplicity. For all its budgetary advantages, Men Wth Wings fails in its one infinitesimal duty-to make aviation exciting. And for all its financial handicaps (\$200,000 is the budget figure for most of Hollywood's disreputable quickies) AMan to Remember is a sincere, effective, and ingenious piece of work. . . . If the point is not clear, you can substitute the title Suez in the foregoing passages for the title Men with Wings; and That Certain Age

^{*}A Man to Remember was budgeted at \$129,000; was brought in by Director Garson Kanin for \$109,000.

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for A Man to Remember. Although That Certain Age, starring vehicle for the charming and rapidly maturing Deanna Durbin, required more than \$200,-000 to produce, it is an excellent example of strategic cost and effect. Its most financially decorous moments surpass in interest the stolid, piled-on extravagancies of Suez, a feat in no way indicating the merit of Miss Durbin's fourth successive triumph."

Money Not Entertaining . . .

MISS BEST'S remarks support the Spectator's often Madvanced opinion that there is not necessarily any relation between the cost of a picture and its entertainment value. But producers proceed on the theory that such relationship exists. At the outset of a production season they boast of the amount of money they are going to spend; when their salesmen approach exhibitors their selling talks are based on the cost of the pictures they have for sale. The price of each picture is based on the same thing. Some of the poorest pictures we have had this season cost over two million dollars each to make, yet their price to exhibitors was based on the fact of their costing that much. Of all the three or four hundred feature pictures made in Hollywood during the current year, and each of which cost \$500,000 or more, not more than three or four compare for sheer merit with the little \$109,000 A Man to Remember. However, as producers have taught the public to look only for big names and big spectacles and not entertainment quality, the little picture will not attract the audiences its excellence as entertainment entitles it to. And that will strengthen the conviction of producers that they must spend money to get money. But the loss of a considerable portion of the foreign market makes it necessary that less money should be spent, so what is the poor producer going to do about it? The first thing he should do is to stop thinking in terms of money and think only in terms of entertainment quality, stop his vulgar boasting about how much a picture costs and center his attention on how good he can make it.

Photography and Box-Office . . .

WE HAVE had many pictures which cost a million or more, but I doubt if we have had one with or more, but I doubt if we have had one with entertainment qualities which could not be duplicated for half a million dollars. The film industry's own breakdown of picture costs revealed forty-one per cent which was accounted for in an indefinite sort of way about as enlightening as "ect, ect." That leaves us only fifty-nine cents out of every dollar to pay the absurd executive salaries and top-heavy overhead and still have enough on hand to provide for the making of the picture. But the whole hundred cents is charged to the picture and the bill is handed to the public for payment. When Century finally began to realize it had a permanent box-office asset in the person of Shirley Temple—something the Spectator realized and expressed three years ago—it immediately announced that more money would be spent on her futures. In line with that determination it added a quarter million dollars to the cost of

her latest production to provide it with color photography. That would seem to indicate a belief on Darryl Zanuck's part that the public patronizes film theatres to see photography, that it would refuse to be thrilled when the heroine is snatched from the clutches of the villain, if the lighting of the set seemed to lack that final touch which makes perfection.

No Substitute for Brains . . .

TOLOR photography has no box-office value on its own account, yet Century spends a quarter of a million dollars in providing Shirley's picture with it while it is trying to figure out how production costs can be reduced. The whole industry is going to be in a bad way unless it speedily realizes that in making screen entertainment money never can be a substitute for picture brains. Establishing a milliondollar budget for a picture before work is begun on the script is an example of artistic and economic idiocy. It tempts the actual makers of the picture to devote more thought to how to spend the million than to how to make the picture entertaining. A script should establish its own budget. If the film industry conducts its business with as much common sense as that which has to be displayed to make successful any other kind of commercial enterprise which is not part of a trust without competition, it could spend on production half as much money as it is spending now and make pictures much better than its current product. The starting point is to make each picture perfect on paper before any other expense is incurred; to shoot it as written and save the vast sum of money now left lying on cutting room floors; and to reduce, by at least half, the average amount of talking which now is driving people away from the film theatre box-offices.

WELL, WE TOLD YOU SO . . .

EROM the Spectator of December 21, 1935: "This T is for the purpose of republishing a year or two hence under the heading, 'We Told You So': Jimmy Ellison is destined to become one of the best box-office bets in pictures." From the Los Angeles Times of November 21, 1938: "Quite enthused about the talents of James Ellison is R.K.O., which has arranged with the actor to appear in three films during the coming year. He will be groomed as one of the most important players at the Radio establishment, and perhaps a star.'

WILL HAVE TO THINK . . .

WITH general business going up and film business going down, the motion picture industry is faced with a situation out of which it will have to think its way. Its old habit of spending its way out of financial lapses will not avail in the present crisis. Motion picture production has gone as far as it can be carried by mere extravagance in the expenditure of money. Returns from pictures no longer pay dividends on what is left on cutting-room floors; the million-dollar picture today is not bringing in enough revenue to pay its way in addition to carrying its share of the losses incurred by the cheaper product. So, having gone as far as it can on money, the film industry must rely on brains to steer its course from now on. It really amounts to a great revolution, as it will start the shift of production from those who think in terms of money to those who think in terms of motion pictures. Thus far the members of the small group which has controlled picture production, have not demonstrated their ability to think deeply. If they had thought even casually about the nature of their product, they now would not be in the position of being forced to think seriously of their finances.

Pressure from the Outside . . .

WHILE one production executive is quoted in the papers as deriving comfort from his claim that film theatre receipts are only six per cent below those of a year ago, Fox West Coast Theatres reveals that for the year its receipts will be eighteen per cent under the figures for last year. West Coast has theatres scattered all over the country and the business it is doing is a reliable indication of the film industry's business as a whole. To those who can think clearly in terms of motion pictures it is obvious the financial plight of the industry is due primarly to the everlasting sameness of the entertainment. Hollywood has been afraid to say anything in its pictures, to keep abreast of current affairs by giving the public entertaining expositions of the matters which occupy its mind. While the whole world is troubled by conditions of utmost gravity and menace, the screen still continues to regard as the matter of first importance the struggle of boy to get girl. For a quarter of a century the same kind of entertainment has filled the screens of the world, the same boy has been getting the same girl and only the clothes they wear have kept pace with changing conditions. But organized outside pressure will force the reforms the industry itself is reluctant to initiate. In this Spectator Robert Joseph has something to say along this line (page 14).

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

JEXT time you are at a Brown Derby restaurant, IV order boiled turkey wings, sauce supreme, with rice. Ordinarily I do not give much thought to food, but when this dish is served me, I can think of nothing else. . . . The new Buick* I saw on display at

... BOOKS AND FILMS ...

A Monthly Publication Devoted to Book-Film Cooperation One Dollar Per Year

Ina Roberts, Editor and Publisher 1742 North Edgemont Street Hollywood, California—OLympia 3968

WHEN BOOKS AND MOVIES MEET By Ina Roberts A Pamphlet Guide to Book-Film Cooperation Price, 25 cents

the auto show certainly is a beauty. . . . A roadside marquee: Secrets of An Actress; Too Hot to Handle. I suppose that meant the house was dark. . . . At one Boulevard corner I hailed a man I mistook for Moroni Olsen; at the next corner I met Moroni; sort of psychic. . . . The new RCA radios* are the handsomest things and have the finest tone. . . . For the first time in our thirty years together, Mrs. Spectator and I left the family on its own over Christmas and New Years and took the open road; as I write this, I am seated on the warm sand at Laguna Beach, my back against a rock, my mind wondering what under the sun to write next. . . . Women one sees on the streets these days look as if they left home in such a hurry they picked up the first things they could grab to serve as hats. . . . My favorite self-provided lunch at home is composed of two crusts of wholewheat bread with a good hunk of cheese between them, plus a cup of strong Lipton's tea* and a hunk of Mrs. Spectator's cake. . . . Mention of Lipton recalls the incident of my meeting Sir Thomas by accident in London; both of us were staying at the Cecil; he took me with him to the opening night of Fanny's First Play, first presented anonymously, later revealed as being by Shaw. . . . I see by my excellent Gruen* watch that I have at least an hour to wait for lunch. They say the waltz is coming back. I hope so. No other dance is so much a part of its music, none

whose grace is expressed so easily and effortlessly that one does not grow too old to waltz. . . . Dancing to a Strauss waltz played on one of the newly designed Steinway pianos*, would be simply divine, particularly if your dancing shoes come from the French Boutierre*. . . . And now, as Wendy, our most adorable grandchild, is waiting to get on my knee and tell me more about what Santa Claus brought her, I will allow Mrs. Oenone Shaw, a teacher, Portland, Oregon, to end this column, and I will put my Sheaffer fountain pen* away: "My dear Mr. Spectator: What a shame it is that the two most wonderful children in the world can't know each other and be friends! In a recent issue of your paper you intimated that Wendy is about the most wonderful thing this side of heaven. I am sure Tamar is. Both are 'going on four.' Wouldn't they have grand times together? Tamar, our valentine, is an only child. Her only brothers and sisters are those she creates in her imagination and tells us all about. I hope Wendy is more fortunate, but fear she is not. At first I read the Spectator to get dependable criticisms of the various pictures. Now I look for news of Wendy. I hope you and Mrs. Spectator get as much joy from your treasure as my mother and I get from ours—'the most wonderful thing in the world.' . . . In the language of my boys at school, 'You stuck out your chin for this'.

^{*}In the last Spectator I mentioned I used Barbasol shaving cream. The Barbasol advertising department sent me, with the company's compliments, a carton containing two jars of the cream.

SCREEN ART AND THE FILM BUSINESS

(The fourth of a series of special articles on the fundamental principles of motion picture production. A reprint from the Spectator of April 10, 1937.)

NO MATTER how fundamentally sound the abstract reasoning underlying a discussion of the screen as an art, it has no practical value if it ignores the demands of the screen as an industry. We cannot deny to those disposed to indulge in it the right to regard it solely as an art, to discuss it as such, to analyze it, to isolate its elements and do what they will with each of them; but unless the welfare of the film box-office be the focal point of discussions of motion pictures, the welfare of the art cannot be advanced. In Hollywood there is an investment of upward of one hundred million dollars in physical equipment necessary to film production. In the United States the number of operating film theatres is approaching the twenty-thousand mark and throughout the world there are approximately seventy-five thousand more in operation. The aggregate theatre investment can be computed only in terms of billions of dollars. As an industry, motion pictures take a high place among those of the United States. The stock of the producing companies is traded in on exchanges, is held by a vast number of people, has a market value which must be protected. An individual might spend his own money in experimenting with screen art, but a company whose chief concern must be for the welfare of its shareholders, must approach the art from the standpoint of its ability to produce dividends. On my shelves are many books whose authors reveal an intelligent grasp of the fundamentals of the screen as an art, who write entertainingly, searchingly and helpfully on film esthetics, but fail to reveal consideration of film finances.

Perfection Not Demanded . . .

THE perfect motion picture can be defined easily: A story told entirely in visual images without the aid of spoken or printed words. There you have the screen in the highest exemplification of its status as an art. And such speechless, wordless pictures are possible to make. But their making requires the infinite patience all creations require if they are to be perfect examples of their several arts. In 1936 the people of the United States paid many millions of dollars to see the kind of screen entertainment offered it. Among the pictures shown there was not one perfect example of screen art. If film producers had exercised the patience required to make their pictures perfect, production would have been slowed down to a point that would have left the theatres closed half the year because of lack of attractions. In 1936 Hollywood made four hundred and eighty feature-length pictures, more than one and one-half for each working day of the year. All the film studios in the world could not produce that many perfect pictures in any one year. But why perfection when the public is willing to purchase something less? Before we can bemoan the lack of perfection we must answer that question in a manner that would satisfy a banker, would make a shareholder in a film company content with smaller, if any, dividends. Keeping the supply of screen entertainment abreast of the theatre demand is a commercial requirement to which the art must yield. Our problem, then, in these discussions is to determine how the art can be served best in a manner which will affect the supply least.

Elements of Papularity . . .

UR first quest is for the quality in the present production which induces eighty million people in the United States to patronize film theatres each week. That is something no other form of entertainment has succeeded in doing. We find its root in the silent pictures which reflected a steady growth in the attendance habit from the inception of screen entertainment to the time when audible dialogue was introduced. The early talkies touched, but did not maintain, a peak of one hundred and twenty million paid admissions per week. Today they have dropped to eighty millions. In the first article in this series we discussed briefly some of the elements which gave the screen its world-wide popularity. We then were pointing out the differences between screen art and stage art. Now let us take one of the differences and discuss it more fully as an individual element. I refer to the part imagination plays in our absorption in a motion picture and its place in our discussion of liberties, for commercial considerations, producers are justified in taking with screen art. We referred to it briefly in our opening discussion which was a general survey of the whole cinematic situation. We now will deal with it more comprehensively.

Imagination and Reality . . .

AS THE silent pictures developed, it captured the fancy of the world to a degree no other form of entertainment had succeeded in attaining. The stage, with its plastic characters, the reality of its spoken lines, and the actuality of the space in which it moved, left little more than the element of time to the active play of the imagination. Emerson defines imagination to be "the use which reason makes of the material world." The stage reached into the material world and assembled behind the footlights real people to tell its stories and real objects to dress its sets. Its third dimension also was real. The imagination did not have to exert itself to accept stage people as the characters they were playing. In short, the stage is an art of reality that leans but lightly upon the imagination. The screen is an art of the illusion of reality. None of its elements is real. It is composed entirely of shadows. Its characters are shadows which are real only in the imagination of the beholder. It photographs the material world which to us becomes material again only through the agency of our imaginations, which provide also the third dimension

which the art actually lacks. It employs no colors, presenting only gradations from white to black as the materials the imagination must use in painting such pictures as it can see on the screen. "I like that shade of pink," says on screen character to another whose gown photographs white, and immediately our imaginations supply the color and we see the gown as pink.

Past Imagination Plays . . .

MAGINATION is the use of our picturing sense. A man imagines he is a great orator. He pictures himself on a platform, thousands below him, cheering his oratory. One does not imagine in the abstract. A jockey cannot imagine he is winning a great race without seeing with his mind's eye the competing horses and the roaring crowds in the grandstand. He uses these impressions of the material world to dress the sets his imagination occupies when it stages its play. The scope of our imaginings is limited to the boundaries set by our own pictorial sense. A man who can picture anything, can imagine anything. He who can picture nothing, can imagine nothing. As we live our lives we have more imaginary joys than real ones, more imaginary troubles than real troubles. The imagination, therefore, is the biggest thing we have. Obviously he who can enjoy it most is he who can give it widest range, he who can provide most settings for his mental plays. If he could paint more pictures he could imagine still more things that pleased him. If I cannot imagine what a tennis match looks like, I cannot imagine myself beating the world's champion; but if you can overcome my deficiency by supplying what I lack and presenting me with a picture showing the contestants in action, my mental powers would have to be limited greatly if I cannot imagine it is I at whose hands the champion is suffering defeat. Perhaps I know the game but am not thinking in terms of tennis. You bring me the picture and immediately I fill it with incidents which please me most. I could have pictured it for myself, but I had not thought of it. It is the picture which prompts my mental action in imagining I am playing tennis.

When Pictures Were Silent . . .

THE silent picture gained ascendancy as an entertainment force because it assembled for the imagtainment force because it assembled for the imagination to toy with the greatest store of material that man's ingenuity could discover. It relieved our pictorial sense of the necessity of fashioning its own pictures. It assembled the material objects composing the pictures, presented them on a flat and lifeless surface, to be used for our enjoyment to the extent our imaginations could people them with life and action. It brought us sunsets in light and shade, clouds which had form but neither depth nor color, and our imaginations made them glow with the brilliant hues that memory gathered from all the real sunsets we had seen. It brought us thousands of still pictures and ran them in such quick succession before our eyes that we imagined motion and saw the characters move. Let us imagine a scene in a silent picture. An

orchestra supplies music to keep our aural sense occupied. If it was selected wisely and played properly, we are unconscious of it, but it is of value to us in that it stimulates our imaginations and so exaggerates the emotional value of scenes we respond to them more readily than we could without the stimulus of the music. In the foreground the hero stands beside an automobile, taking leave of the heroine. You, being a woman, remember a spring night, a fountain and the perfume of honeysuckle; a man asked you something that made you think his voice was sweet music, and your imagination bestows the same voice upon the man who stands by the automobile on the screen. I, being a man, recall a night when the full moon seemed about to fall out of the black sky into the Promenade des Anglais at Nice; the gentle lapping of the indolent Mediterranean—a voice that whispered in my ear, and when the girl speaks on the screen I hear again the whisper. What the two say is of no importance. We supply the speeches, and although yours in no way resembles mine, each of us is satisfied because he imagines the words that make the scene perfect.

We Entertain Ourselves . . .

A DOG crosses the packground and the something. You hear the bark as the roar that DOG crosses the background and stops to bark at comes from your mastiff; I hear it as the voice of my cocker spaniel. Silently the automobile heads into the background, up a road which disappears over a hill. It gets farther away, grows small and finally is only a tiny spot as it sinks out of sight. What have we seen? The automobile did not get one inch farther away from us from the time it was a big thing in the foreground until it seemed to be a tiny thing in the deep background. All the time it was on the same flat surface. We did not see a dog in the background because there is no background, and what we saw was the photograph of a dog. There were no boy and girl on the screen engaged in conversation. We saw only shadows, and shadows cannot talk. Still we experienced pleasurable emotional reaction as we viewed the scene. The pleasure was supplied by our imagiations which reacted in our several different ways to the suggestions made by the screen. In other words, we were entertained solely by our imaginations. What we saw on the screen did not entertain us. We got from it only what our imaginations put into it.

Appeal of Screen Art . . .

SCREEN art intrigued us from the start because it had no voice and was forced to use the sign language. Its signs were pictures of what it wanted us to know, and merely as a convenience to itself and to us, it acquired the habit early in life of throwing printed words on the screen to make the meaning of some of the scenes plainer or to notify us of a change of locale. But the screen never asked us to believe it. It would show us a man writing a letter in the Australian bush, and in the fraction of a second we would see his wife reading the letter in a hotel in Switzerland. Our reason would tell us that this was

impossible, but our imaginations accepted it as fact, and we became concerned only in the wife's reaction to what her husband wrote. We derive pleasure from our esthetic creations, either imaginary or real, because each of us creates what pleases him most. You cannot force me to enjoy yours, nor can I force you to enjoy mine. Perhaps, however, each will enjoy the other's. If we think alike, that would follow. But of this we may be certain: I always would enjoy mine, whereas it is inevitable that sometimes I would not enjoy yours. And the reverse is true.

Why the Screen Prospered . . .

WE DID not enjoy all the silent pictures we saw. Our imaginations have their own reasoning powers which reject material unfit for the building of dreams. I might reject a picture you enjoyed because your imagination was equal to the task of remodeling it to suit your fancy. That is why all silent pictures made money. Each pleased one of us. The dim light of film theatres, the reposeful atmosphere, the soft music, quieted our critical senses until our imaginations accepted much that our intellects would have spurned if the medium had been an aggressive one that challenged our thoughtful consideration or tried to bulldoze our imaginations into the acquiescent acceptance of what we saw on the screen. But it did neither. It lulled us into indifference, soothed us into complacency, and we saw in it virtues it did not possess. It achieved its purpose of creating in us a perfect illusion of reality and almost anything pleased us because we willed it so. Obviously if our imaginations created our screen entertainment, the pictures which pleased us most must have been those which left most to our imaginations. Before the advent of the sound camera, the film industry prospered enormously because it was forced to assign to our imaginations the greater portion of the burden of interpreting the entertainment the camera suggested. That is what made its product salable and sustained the film industry's even level of prosperity.

All Elements of Prosperity ...

EXCEPT for the inclusion of narrative and spoken titles, silent pictures were true to cinematic art in that they provided nothing which could be left to the imagination. If, before mechanical inventions had made them a fact, a businessman could have visualized them as they grew to be, could have imagined their visual sweep, their power to stir our emotions by reducing the art of story-telling to terms of utmost simplicity and elemental appeal, he could have foretold the prosperity forced upon them by the public's ready acceptance of motion pictures as a form of entertainment. He could have reasoned for himself that intelligent production of pictures must become a profitable business. And when sound came to Hollywood our businessman would have known that the first precaution must be to avoid using the new element in a manner disturbing to the elements responsible for the salability of the product prior to that time. Let us follow the course his reasoning would have taken. Analysis of his product would have re-

vealed to him its simplicity, its universal appeal, pictorial language being one all ages and all people could understand. He would have realized the restful quality of screen entertainment, its silence, its elemental manner of story-telling were box-office assets it was imperative should not be tampered with; that the new element had to be used sparingly and intelligently to guard against its changing the whole nature of the product Hollywood had been offering for sale.

Went Into New Business . . .

BUT Hollywood producers are not good businessmen, never have understood the nature of the product the public bought so eagerly, never have recognized the screen as an art. They have used the sound device in a manner to take them out of their old business and put them in a new one with an entirely different line of goods. They dismissed imagination as a factor in their merchandising, substituted complexity for the simplicity of the screen's method of expression, substituted noise for the quiet responsible for the restful quality of their old product. Unfortunately for those who have money invested in film securities and those who patronize film theatres, Hollywood is not aware it went out of one business and into another. Physically the making of a motion picture is a complex process, one engaging the services of experts in a wide range of crafts. Artistically it is the simplest method of expression available to any of the arts. It is not difficult to make a good motion picture. The screen can tell a story more graphically and with greater ease than it can be told in print; a minute's photography can bring to the world a picture as beautiful as one an artist takes weeks to paint. The screen is the only narrational art with the power to make its appeal directly to the emotions. But what IS a good motion picture? In the next Spectator we will discuss that.

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SOME LATE PREVIEWS

TAY GARNETT MAKES GOOD . . .

● TRADE WINDS; United Artists release of Tay Garnett production; presented by Walter Wanger; director, Tay Garnett; screen play, Dorothy Parker, Alan Campbell, Frank R. Adams; original story, Tay Garnett; photography, Rudolph Mate; Asiatic photography, J. B. Shackelford; process photography, Ray Binger; editorial supervisor, Otho Lovering; film editors, Dorothy Spencer and Walt Reynolds; art director, Alexander Toluboff; associate art director, Alexander Golitzen; music, Alfred Newman; assistant director, Percy Ikerd. Stars Fredric March and Joan Bennett. Features Ralph Beltamy, Ann Sothern, Sidney Blackmer, Thomas Mitchell, Robert Elliott. Supporting cast: Charles Sellon, Patricia Farr, Wilma Francis, Phyllis Barry, Dorothy Tree, Kay Linaker, Linda Winters, Walter Byron, Wilson Benge, Harry Paine, Franklin Parker, Hooper Atchley, Lee Phelps, John Webb Dillion, Dick Rush, Mrs. Sojin, Princess Luana, Marie de Forest, Beryl Wallace, Paulita Arvizu, Aiko Magara, Suzanne Kaaren, Gloria Youngblood, Lotus Liu, Ethelreda Leopold. Running time, 90 minutes.

TAY GARNETT is a producer-director who is go-I ing places. Trade Winds is the first product of an experiment actuated by a spirit of adventure which took Tay around the world in his own yacht. I am not aware whether the film he brought back was a by-product of the adventure or its inspiration; but, whichever it was, the adventurer returned with many miles of foreign lands rolled up in tin boxes to give film fans something new to look at as backgrounds for pictures. To round things off nicely, Tay also wrote the story for the first picture to use the backgrounds, produced it under the banner of the astute Walter Wanger, and directed it in a manner to make Trade Winds as entertaining a picture as one would wish for. The backgrounds against which the story is told have a wide geographic range, are picturesque, educational and refreshingly new. It is a murdermystery story which we do not know is a mystery until it has run almost its entire length. Adroit use is made of the foreign footage, the story leading a detective halfway around the world on the trail of the girl wanted in San Francisco for the murder, romantic interest being developed by Cupid's taking charge of things when the detective overtakes the girl.

Performances Are Excellent . . .

GARNETT'S direction is notable for the number of excellent performances it developes. Even though a murder is the motivating element of the story, the picture is strong in comedy, Freddie March distinguishing himself in a role which he makes highly amusing as well as effective by his sincere interpretation of it. He is less the actor and more the human being than in any other part he has played in years. Opposite him is the delectable Joan Bennett whom we see both as the blonde beauty nature made her (I think) and as an equally beautiful brunette when she finds it necessary to change her appearance in an effort to shake the detective who is hot on her trail. Joan's part is the most serious in the picture and ably she developes all its possibilities. Another

of my staunch favorites to appear is Ann Sothern, who, like the other two, gives one of the finest performances she has to her credit. In one sequence she finds life so crass, she seeks relief in generous indulgence in powerful liquor, and the resultant comedy is extremely amusing, a really brilliant exhibition of a nice girl's becoming drunk without a total loss of her niceness. Ralph Bellamy completes the quartette having most to do with advancing the story. His is a purely comedy characterization which he handles admirably.

Well Constructed Screen Play . . .

CCREEN play by Dorothy Parker, Alan Campbell and Frank R. Adams is another exhibition of adroitness in working backwards, so to speak, from scenic background. An unusual problem is presented when writers have to work from previously established visual values, but the collaborators proved themselves equal to the task. The story in essence being a chase, presented the additional difficulty of prolonging it and at the same time keeping it interesting. March's characterization serves as a device for providing the proper length. Freddie falls in love with every pretty girl he sees, makes the same speeches to each; tries to double-cross everyone engaged with him on the murder case, and is, on the whole, a rather unworthy individual, yet so skilfully is his part written and acted, we like him all the time, enjoy his flightiness, approve his taste in girls, applaud his final triumph. To Walter Wanger's credit is the casting of most capable players in all the secondary and minor roles. Run down the list of names and you will find well known ones whose roles made their appearances brief. Rudolph Maté's photography admirably matches in quality that done abroad by J. B. Shackelford. There is no visual suggestion in the picture that all of it was not shot at the same time. Contributing in a notable way to this achievement is the process photography of Ray Binger. And a word of praise is due Dorothy Spencer and Walt Reynolds for theiir handling of a film editing job which was not an easy one. The picture is provided generously with background music, Alfred Newman's score adding greatly to its entertainment value. And when you see Joan and Ann you will approve the gowns designed for them by Irene and Helen Taylor.

MINDS ITS OWN BUSINESS . . .

● THE GIRL DOWNSTAIRS; Metro production and release; director, Norman Taurog; producer, Harry Rapf; screen play, Harold Goldman, Felix Jackson and Karl Noti; based on short story by Sandor Hunyady; musical score, Dr. William Axt; song, "When You're In Love," music and lyrics by Bob Wright and Chet Forrest; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art director, Daniel B. Cathcart; set decoration, Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe, Dolly Tree; photography, Clyde DeVinna; film editor, Elmo Veron. Cast: Franchot Tone, Franciska Gaal, Walter

Connolly, Reginald Gardiner, Rita Johnson, Reginald Owen, Franklin Pangborn, Robert Coote, Barnett Parker, Priscilla Lawson, James B. Carson, Charles Judels, Billy Gilbert. Running time, 76 minutes.

ELIGHTFUL entertainment; beautifully directed, capable cast, meritorious screen play, imposing production. Norman Taurog has made this intimate story into one of the nicest little comedies the screen has presented in a long time. In construction, the screen play is particularly interesting. Written by Harold Goldman. Felix Jackson and Karl Noti, it is notable for what might be termed its economy of distraction. It tells us everything we need know, but is a refreshing departure in that it refrains from telling us a lot it is not necessary for us to know. For instance, we see Franchot Tone in surroundings which suggest he has wealth and good taste; his behavior suggests breeding; his conversation, education; but who he is, whether his parents are living, the existence of brothers or sisters—these are things we are not told. And we have Walter Connolly as just "Mr. Brown." He lives with his daughter (Rita Johnson) in an imposing mansion, has a large staff of servants. Who he is, where he got his money, whether his wife is alive or dead, are among the details we are spared because they have nothing to do with the story. Story construction of this sort is getting back to first cinematic principles which demand there should be nothing on the screen which the audience can imagine.

Made by Good Direction . . .

ONLY expert direction could make The Girl Downstairs as entertaining as it is. It is a purely mental picture with no physical thrills or mass shots to make it visually and dramatically imposing. Harry Rapf, producer, whose pictures seem to be getting better all the time, saw to it that all its elements blended harmoniously. Cedric Gibbons and associates provided artistic and pictorially impressive sets, Dolly Tree designed gowns to make the women attractive, Clyde DeVinna photographed everything with rare artistry, and story and dialogue were in tone with the visual contributions. Franciska Gaal takes a long step forward in her progress towards big box-office recognition. She is endowed abundantly with the quality which made Mary Pickford America's Sweetheart—an ingenious appeal, which enlists your sympathy and puts you on her side when complications arise. Franchot Tone never before appealed to me quite as strongly, consequently I rate this as his best performance to date. Walter Connolly is one of those actors who never fails. Sometimes I wonder, when I see him in support of a glamour girl who gets all the glory, if either the girl or the public realizes how much he contributes to a picture to make it successful. If I previously have seen a picture in which Rita Johnson appeared, I cannot recall it, but certainly she attracted my attention in this one. She seems to have what the screen needs. Robert Coote, son of a noted father whom I saw in London stage productions, makes his initial American bow in The Girl Downstairs, and creates a favorable impression.

All the others in the cast give completely satisfactory performances.

COLBERT CREATES A VITAL ZAZA . . .

 ZAZA; Paramount production and release; director, George Cukor; producer, Albert Lewin; screen play, Zoe Akins; from play by Pierre Berton and Charles Simon; musical director, Boris Morros; songs, Frederick Hollander and Frank Loesser: musical advisor, Phil Boutelje; photography, Charles Lang, Jr.; special photographic effects, Gordon Jennings; film editor, Edward Dmytryk; art direction, Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; costumes, Edith Head; production consultant, Alla Nazimova; musical numbers staged by LeRoy Prinz. Stars Claudette Colbert. Features Herbert Marshall. Supporting cast: Bert Lahr, Helen Westley, Constance Collier, Genevieve Tobin, Walter Catlett, Ann Todd, Rex O'Malley, Ernest Cossart, Janet Waldo, Dorothy Tree, Monty Woolley, Maurice Murphy, Frank Puglia. Running time, 83 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

RICH display of continental atmosphere of an A earlier generation, scenes with rare sparkle, and, above all, a scintillating Claudette Colbert in the title role, these are the morning-after impressions of Zaza. Miss Colbert completely dominates the picture. and despite the fact that the piece has structural shortcomings and ends on a rather unsatisfying note, motion picture audiences cannot help but be impressed by her vital performance. Making the part serve her as it has served a line of distinguished actresses of stage and screen for several decades-Carter, Nazimova, Swanson—she vividly brings to life a minx, a playful courtesan, a woman desperate from disillusion in the man she loves. Her can-can number is especially spirited and amusing. Other parts are well acted too. George Cukor, bent on wringing all the dramatic possibilities from the material, and possibly influenced by traditional concepts of the play, has seen that the scenes are played to the hilt. So vigorously played are his scenes at times, in fact, that they border on theatricality. It is a treatment which results in notable ebullience in the lighter scenes, but in lessened conviction and emotional effectiveness in the heavier ones, which are already burdened with heavily theatrical writing. His scenes, however, are always well thought out and the players perform with admirable sureness and economy and rhythm. One wonders if Alla Nazimova, who was production consultant, should not be credited for a measure of this merit. The same virtues were to be seen in her recent stage production of Ghosts.

Stage Play Too Evident . . .

NOTWITHSTANDING the vividness of the performances, the vehicle shows its age. In the parlance of the theatre world, it "creeks." Popular concepts of what is theatrically forceful, as well as viewpoints in the realm of social philosophy, have changed considerably. Not that the story could not have been made into a poignant little tale. That it has not achieved the emotional potency it might have had is due principally to two reasons. In the first place, Zoe Akins, in writing the screen play, has relied too heavily on the old stage play, with the evident intent of preserving its spirit. Numerous passages of dialogue are stagey. Historical interest is frequently an attribute in the reviving of a play on the stage, but such an interest plays no part in the public appreciation of motion pictures. The cinema has no theatrical tradition; it is a new and individual medium of expression. It achieves artistic potency only in so far as its subject matter is couched in cinematic terms, which implies simplicity and a realistic approach.

Story Needs Proportioning . . .

AS FOR the structural deficiencies of the screen play, it is impossible to say how much of the responsibility should be laid at Miss Akin's feet. I hear tell the censors did a bit of whacking. At any rate, the film as is is in need of proportioning. Too much time is devoted to matters which are irrelevant, too little to portions of the story which need emphasis. We never come to feel that Zaza's love affair is a deep and tender thing, which is doubtless the principal reason why her visit to the home of the man and his wife, during which she is deterred from her intent to expose him by meeting his child, does not pack the emotional punch that it should.

Staging Is Excellent . . .

THE performance of Herbert Marshall as the lover, I though a smooth enough job, seemed lacking in vigor. In fairness to him, though, it must be said that the editing may be mostly responsible for this impression. Of the other players, Bert Lahr, Helen Westley, Constance Collier, and Genevieve Tobin are stand-outs. No stone has been left unturned to give the picture an atmospheric and dramatic background. Of the production values, Edith Head's dazzlingly flamboyant costumes will attract much comment, especially among women spectators. The art direction of Hans Dreier and Robert Usher, with set decorations by A. E. Freudeman, is meticulously appropriate and pleasing to the eye. In photographing the whole, Charles Land has captured a wide range of mood. Special photographic effects were by Gordon Jennings. There are two songs, by Frederick Hollander and Frank Loesser, Zaza and Hello, My Darling, the latter a sentimental ditty which may realize some popularity. Boris Morros's musical direction is of its usual high caliber. Albert Lewin,

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OF SLAVES AND TRANSPORTATION . . .

● STAND UP AND FIGHT; Metro picture and release; director, W. S. Van Dyke II; producer, Mervyn LeRoy; screen play, James H. Cain, Jane Murfin and Harvey Fergusson; from story by Forbes Parkhill; musical score, Dr. William Axtart director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art director, Urie McCleary; photography. Leonard Smith; film editor, Frank Sullivan. Stars Wallace Beery and Robert Taylor. Supporting cast: Florence Rice, Helen Broderick, Charles Bickford, Barton MacLane, Charley Grapewin, John Qualen, Robert Gleckler, Clinton Rosemond, Cy Kendall, Paul Everton, Claudia Morgan, Selmer Jackson, Robert Middlemass, Jonathan Hale. Running time, 95 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

WHAT should prove to be a good box-office feature comes from Metro in the new Robert Taylor Toomes from Metro in the new Robert Taylor-Wallace Beery offering, Stand Up and Fight. In essence a blood-and-thunder melodrama of the old West, sufficiently so for it to win favor with the stomp-and-whistle trade, the story yet is embroidered with elements which will appeal to class audiencesa treatise on the slave problem prior to the Civil War, a lusty portrayal of Western pioneer life of that time, and a romantic saga of the growth of the Baltimore and Ohio railway. Characterizations are diversified and meaty in the screen play by James H. Cain. Jane Murfin and Harvey Fergusson, from an original by Forbes Parkhill, and they have been sketched on the screen sharply and with a flair by the direction of W. S. Van Dyke. Robert Taylor has not had a more virile role than this of the Southern aristocrat, combining the virtues, including courage, of Southern breeding and the shortcomings of a pampered existence, who, having lost his property, journeys to the Western frontier and receives his come-uppance, finding strength and a more healthy viewpoint in work as a common laborer. Quite a romantic figure he cuts, poised, elegant, and proud. Taylor is becoming a capable actor. Beery, though, as usual, has the edge on the other players for trouping honors. Playing a domineering but rather stupid manager of a stage coach line, a mixture of rogue and good fellow, he fills the screen with much gusto and gets plenty of laughs. He and Taylor indulge in two fist fights which are very robustious, the latter revealing a badly mangled countenance after one of them. Only I hope the average spectator will not as readily discern the use of doubles in several shots.

Evinces Good Supervision . . .

THERE is a strong cast of supporting players. Florence Rice is pretty and pleasing as the heroine, owner of the stage coach line, and Helen Broderick, as her aunt, makes the most of her comedy material. Charles Bickford and Barton MacLane are forceful as the culprits, who pose as abolitionists, run slaves from the South and murder them when illegal sale cannot be arranged. Impressive in the cast is Clinton Rosewood, negro actor, whose portrayal of a former slave of the young aristocrat, now marked for death by the slave runners, is possessed of a deep pathos.

John Qualen, Robert Gleckler, and Cy Kendall do well. The picture has a glitter and technical finesse which evince good producer supervision, in this case that of Mervyn LeRoy. Audiences will be interested in the old high-chimneyed Calloway locomotive, dating from 1837 and loaned by the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. A significant and well composed shot was the the concluding one, in which the stage coach and the new railway train run a race, the latter slowly gaining distance as the scene dissolves.

Sepia-Tone Value Questioned . . .

THIS latter portion of the picture, however, is somewhat anti-climactic, since the main complication of the story unties itself when the slave runner problem is solved. A bit of trimming here would mean an improvement. The sets in the Southern sequence, done by Cedric Gibbons and his associate, Urie McCleary, have fine character and the Western sets and background are also possessed of much flavor. An unusually meritorious job of photography has been contributed by Leonard Smith, though I question the value of sepia-tone film. It attracts attention to itself, and subtracts sharpness of impression. A musical score, heard now and then, is by Dr. William Axt. Other scenes would have benefited by the use of a musical background.

TAKES IMAGINATIVE FLIGHT . . .

● TOPPER TAKES A TRIP; Hal Roach-United Artists; producer, Milton H. Bren; director, Norman Z. MacLeod; screen play, Jack Jevne, Eddie Moran and Corey Ford; original, Thorne Smith; photographer, Norbert Brodine; photographic effects, Roy Seawright; film editor, William Terhune; art director, Charles D. Hall; set decorator, W. L. Stevens; musical score, Edward Powell and Hugo Friedhofer. Cast: Constance Bennett, Roland Young, Billie Burke, Alan Mowbray, Verree Teasdale, Franklin Pangborn, Alexander D'Arcy, Paul Hurst, Armand Kaliz, Eddy Conrad, Spencer Charters, Irving Pichel, Leon Belasco, Georges Renavent, Skippy, Running time, 78 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

WHATEVER one's impression of the entertainment values in Topper Takes a Trip may be, he must admit that the picture embraces one of the most fanciful ideas to be brought to the screen in recent years. It is this boldness of its imaginative flight, its utter originality, that is its chief attraction. If memory serves aright, this novelty attracted a considerable gross in the earlier Topper. I warn, however, that this Topper Takes a Trip, like its predecessor, is a picture the appreciation of which will depend largely on the personal equation, that there are some who will consider the film rather silly and lacking in human interest values. Personally, I found a good deal of fun in the picture. There are at least twice as many of Roy Seawright's photographic effects as in the earlier production, and they are executed with even greater adroitness. The spectral Constance Bennett and her little dog materialize and vanish with remarkable glibness, cigarettes puff in mid-air, a pencil writes without a hand to guide it, and there is an intriguing shot of the little dog walking across a room propelled only by his front legs, the hind portion of the animal remaining invisible.

Spectral Pranks Prominent . . .

FICTIONALLY, the sequel is neatly tied in with its predecessor. Topper is on the witness stand at the hearing of the divorce suit brought against him by his wife because of the beyond-the-vale Marion Kerby's untimely materialization in his room. Here he recounts the automobile accident which led to the death of Marion and her husband George, and the incident of the specters' making their presence known to him and informing him that each was obliged to remain on earth until he had accomplished one good deed. For the purpose of this recital a sequence is worked in from the earlier production, in which Cary Grant appears. The latter is not seen in the story proper, however, the explanation being that he has already accomplished his good deed and is now luxuriating in heaven. The present yarn is given over to Marion's achieving St. Peter's qualification for entry into the heavenly portal, which consists in dragging the perplexed Topper to the Riviera and reuniting him with his wife, after having saved the rather scatter-brained spouse from a designing and phoney baron. There is really not much plot substance in the picture, and a good deal of the action is given over to Marion's spectral pranks and the reactions of embarrassment on the part of Topper and astonishment from bystanders. The pranks, so heavily played up, pretty well exhaust their comic possibilities by the end of the picture. A sequence in a cocktail bar toward the beginning of the film is definitely in need of pacing. Perhaps the editor's shears would help.

Is Played With Verve ...

CONSTANCE BENNETT plays engagingly the mischievous spook and carries on something of a fashion show throughout the picture in the gowns designed for her by Irene, which are indeed picturesque. Roland Young gets the most in the way of humor out of the role of Topper, and in his usual subtle style. Billie Burke is at her best as his wife, being very effervescent and comical. She is something of a fashion plate too, gowned by Omar Kiam. Alan Mowbray, Verree Teasdale, Franklin Pangborn, and Alexander D'Arcy are all in good fettle. Director Norman Z. McLeod has put zest and a fine comic spirit into the show. There is an ingenious musical score by Edward Powell and Hugo Friedhofer, and a good quality of general photography from Norbert Brodine. The yarn is taken, of course, from Thorne Smith's novel of the same title, and screen-played by Jack Jevne, Eddie Moran and Corey

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Ford. Considering that the story snaps its fingers at verisimilitude, there is little one can say about it. He might query, for instance, where the spook got her many changes of finery, or why, if she could assume material form so readily, she did not stay materialized and let it go at that-but with what point? The sole purpose of the yarn is to divert, and it will either do that or it won't. It might be said that the dialogue is generally crisp and witty; some of Billie Burke's lines are capital nonsense.

WELL DONE MELODRAMA . . .

● PACIFIC LINER; RKO Radio; executive producer, Lee Marcus: producer, Robert Sisk; director, Lew Landers; assistant director, Sam Ruman; screen play, John Twist; original Anthony Coldeway and Henry Roberts Symonds: musical director, Russell Bennett; photography, Nicholas Musuraca; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Albert D'Agostino; set decorations, Darrell Silvera; gowns, Edward Stevenson; montage, Douglas Travers and John E. Tribby; film editor, Harry Marker. Cast: Victor McLaglen, Chester Morris, Wendy Barrie, Alan Hale, Barry Fitzgerald, Allan Lane, Halliwell Hobbes, Cyrus W. Kendall, Paul Guilfoyle, John Wray, Emory Parnell, Adia Kuznetzoff, John Bleifer, Ernest Whit-man. Running time, 76 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

THERE is good stuff in Pacific Liner, produced by Robert Sisk for RKO. Irony, grimness, and excellent suspense are packed into this tale of the ruthless driving of a crew of stokers, attacked by the dreaded Asiatic Cholera, in order that the ship will arrive on schedule. John Twist has done an imaginative and vigorous job of screen play writing and Lew Landers has created the story on the screen with vivid characterizations and situations of impressive dramatic force. Practically the entire action takes place on board the Pacific liner. A coolie stowaway infects the stokers with the feared disease. They are confined to the lower quarters of the ship and knowledge of the epidemic is kept from the rest of the crew and the passengers. The captain depends on a brutish chief engineer to keep the ship under full steam, despite the fact that most of the stokers are bedridden, a number having died, and that the remainder are having their resistance lowered by long hours at overwork. A somewhat symbolic figure is a young doctor, representing the force of scientific thought pitted against ignorance.

Characterizations Outstanding . . .

 $\neg AST$ as the engineer, Victor McLaglen is seen to better advantage than he has been for some time. From a writing standpoint the character is pretty well rounded—the fellow is as hard on himself as on his men, picks up a shovel himself when there are not enough stokers left to man the furnaces. The key to the man's personality is the affinity he has with the pulsating engines of the boat; he glories in them, for he is himself a powerful human machine. He holds in contempt the "bugs" against which the doctor would protect the men, feels that hard work will drive them out. McLaren seems to have grasped the psychology of the fellow and in his bigger

scenes is truly dynamic. Chester Morris does good trouping as the doctor fighting against both disease and ignorance, and Wendy Barrie is capable as the ship's nurse. Admirable characterizations are turned in by Barry Fitzgerald, Alan Hale, Paul Guilfoyle, and others.

Spots Could Be Improved . . .

PROBABLY the ironical contrast between the plight of the stokers and the luxurious and trivial life of the passengers was a bit overdrawn. Passengers are depicted as a rather effete lot. Actually there are many persons on board ships who are carrying on the world's work, salesmen and missionaries and such. And certainly they are entitled to a little recreation; most people work hard. Moreover, the character of the ship's captain might have been elaborated upon, considering his pivotal position in the story. His apparent indifference to the illness and death among the stokers is a weak part of the story, though rather well glossed over, at that. It would seem, though, that the doctor would have gone to the captain, explained to him that the men were wearing down their resistance against the disease, that there was danger of its spreading to other parts of the ship, and that the schedule should be forgotten about. Or am I being finicky? At any rate, for a moderately budgeted picture, Pacific Liner is very good produce. A little more thought and a little more care might have resulted in a really outstanding picture. Nicholas Musuraca's dramatic photographic studies of the men is a meritorious contribution to the film. Special effects were by Vernon L. Walker. There is effective background music provided by Russell Bennett, montage from Douglas Travers, and first-rate editing from Harry Marker. The original story was by Anthony Coldeway and Henry Roberts Symonds.

JOHN GARFIELD SCORES . . .

● THEY MADE ME A CRIMINAL: Warners picture and release; director, Busby Berkeley; associate producer, Benjamin Glazer; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; screen play, Sig Herzig; from novel by Bertram Millhauser and Beulah Marie Dix; photography, James Wong Howe; art director, Anton Grot; film editor, Jack Killifer; music, Max Steiner; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; assistant director, Russ Saunders. Cast: John Garfield, Claude Rains, Ann Sheridan, May Robson, Billy Halop, Bobby Jordan, Leo Gorcey, Huntz Hall, Gabriel Dell, Bernard Punsley, Gloria Dickson, Robert Gleckler, John Ridgley, Barbara Pepper, William Davidson, Ward Bond, Robert Strange, Louis Jean Heydt, Frank Riggi, Cliff Clarke, Dick Wessel, Raymond Brown, Sam Hayes. Running time, 89 minutes.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

LTHOUGH Warner Brothers might have given A John Garfield stronger material for his second picture, he scores magnificently in They Made Me a Criminal. Interviewed in New York on his return from Hollywood recently, he expressed the modest belief that he was just another one of those flashes in the pan, and that most of the ballyhoo that was raging around his head was just exploitation for Four Daughters. Garfield is good, and no matter what

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kind of a story they give him in the future he shows every promise of standing out. His current effort is one of those fast-moving, zippy melodramas that punches its way from beginning to end. The story doesn't ask for much by way of intense dramatics, but when it does ask, Garfield answers with both barrels. Warners have, as they know, star material when they have Garfield. Here's a hope that his next stories have the force and strength that is on a par with his abilities.

Story Has Novel Twist . . .

TO THE eternal credit of Screen Writer Sig Herzig and to Authors Bertram Millhauser and Beulah Marie Dix, they have concocted a fighting story with original twists and a fresh background. The audience will be in there with the hero boxing every round and hoping he wins. That is a lot to expect of any audience which has been fed years of fifteenth round victories. And John Garfield, the champion, loses his fight, too. The story recounts the career of a cocky wiseguy who wins the championship and gets himself involved in a newspaper man's murder. On the advice of his lawyer he hotfoots it out of town and disappears. He hits the open road, changes his name and tries to change his life. He almost does when he reaches an Arizona date ranch, but one New York detective, who was never convinced that he had been killed in an accident as reported in the press and accepted by headquarters, goes out to find him. When he does he starts to bring the accused back, realizes at the last moment that although all evidences points toward his guilt the lad is really innocent. He returns to New York empty-handed, convinced that as far as he is concerned the boxer should be dead. The audience knows, of course, that Garfield is innocent, since they see the crime committed. But it leaves an unfortunate impression at the end when the audience realizes that although another man who really committed the murder paid for his crime with his life in the burning auto crash, Garfield is never exonerated. Here, as in Angels with Dirty Faces, Warners raise a moral problem which they never answer.

Cast Excellent . . .

CUPPORTING Garfield are the Dead End kids and OGloria Dickson. The Kids are as fresh as ever, and I for one do not tire of their toughness. The Kids are a little less boisterous than heretofore, most of their acting is polishing up, and in this instance they did little mugging. Gloria Dickson as the date farm heart interest gives a well-paced performance. May Robson as the mother of the date farm brood, Kids, Gloria and Garfield, is her old excellent self. Claude Rains as the ambitious detective who hounds Garfield down was hopelessly miscast in a part that he underplayed, something to his credit. Rains is too good an actor to waste on a role that practically anybody might have essayed. Ann Sheridan was convincing as a night club something-or-other and John Ridgely stood out in the role of the murdered newspaper man. Louis Jean Heydt has been doing so well with

minor parts that he deserves feature role consideration. Director Busby Berkeley has forsaken terpsichore for drama, and has given us an excellently paced story. To Jack Killifer praise for imaginative cutting and timing. James Wong Howe's camera work is of the highest quality.

CONSUMERS' CINEMA

By Robert Joseph

IN Films Come From America, a book by Gilbert Seldes, recently reviewed for these columns, the author makes one significant point. He believes that corporate structure, political jockeying and Wall Street financing notwithstanding, the movies really belong to the millions of people who have poured billions of dollars into the business since the days of the first peep show. The obligation which the industry owes these public underwriters is one of which film executives are not acutely aware. The interest of the industry in its public ceases at that point where the ticket purchaser slides his quarter across the brass ticket plate. In contrast a recent issue of Time told of the attitude of the automobile industry, and General Motors in particular, toward its buying public. Recounting the career of one of the company's designer-executives, the article pointed out that many of the thousands of suggestions which came to him were actually put into practice. The likeliest ideas for comfort and improvement were manufactured into reality. The writer cites, if I am not mistaken, the V-type windshield, flushed dashboard gadgets, foot courtesy light for passing at night, the ash tray and cigarette lighter. These are all standard equipment in the new models, and all of them were originally suggestions and hints by disinterested motorists.

What Does Consumer Know? . . .

QUITE correctly the executive will ask, "Well, what does the consumer know about picture making? Sure, we'll listen to suggestions about more comfortable seats, wider aisles, maybe better recording." Unfortunately, the executive's analogy is neither complete nor fair. The auto dealer is selling a physical commodity, of which comfort is an intrinsic part. The picture producer is selling a kind of mental stimulation, of which comfort, except for clear vision and clear sound, is not an intrinsic part. It does not seem amiss to give the right of suggestion to the consumer. And it does not seem unreasonable to suspect that there can be some good suggestions and ideas out of an American movie-going public of eighty million weekly. Consumers' Cooperatives are growing throughout the country. They have come into existence, not because people liked the idea of making it difficult for large distributors and purveyors; they came into existence because they filled a need.

Cinema Consumers Cooperatives . . .

THE latest field to be invaded by the co-op movement is the motion picture industry. Cooperatives wield a considerable influence by the power of boycott, as a single example. More than this they can be a

strident voice for better pictures, for films with a purpose and a point of view. And just as farmer cooperatives arose throughout the middle west when the farmers needed them because large chains were somewhat blind to rural problems, so cinema cooperatives have arisen in the same fashion. One of these is Associate Film Audiences, a nation-wide group, with branches in the principal cities of the country.

Aim Is Better Pictures . . . WHENEVER a group of clear-thinking, liberal minded people get together, someone is sure as fate to call them "long hairs" and "parlor pinks." These are appellations which refer to men who want to invent a new kind of pullman stop cord or who want to clean up slum areas. Name-calling is one of the easiest ways to dodge an issue. Recently Editor Beaton referred to Terry Ramsey's somewhat obscure diatribe about a kindred organization in the columns of the garrish Motion Picture Herald. First it might be important to quote the purpose of Associated Films, as subscribed to by all kinds and shades of organizations. "Associated Film Audiences is a nation-wide non-profit organization. Its purpose is to give voice to the millions of American moviegoers who desire to see films with fresh dramatic substance—new and enchanting realities of life in our world today with variety, truthfulness and artistic presentation." Among a long roster of participating organizations are Congregational and Christian Churches of U. S. A., Federal Council of Churches of Christ, Presbyterian Church of U. S. A., World Peaceways, Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A. I have intentionally cited these groups to indicate that Associated does cover a vast field, with no brief for any school

The Twelve-Year Myth...

of thought or issue.

O^{NE} of the heavy chains which shackles the motion picture industry to inferior product is the persistent twelve-year-old mentality myth. The myth has long since passed out of that realm and is a motto worked out in sampler style, set over the door of practically every picture producer's office. To break the shackles rise Associated Film Audiences and Films for Democracy, organizations planning to pro-

duce pictures to "safeguard and extend American democracy." Their sponsors form a notable list of some of the foremost minds in the country. I do not doubt but that they will eventually get the funds they need. Their initial efforts may not have the gloss and zip of an unimportant Hollywood musical, but give them time. The efforts of organizations of a healthy and an unhealthy sign. Healthy because it proves that there are people who take their pictures seriously and who are vigilant about democracy; unhealthy because of the implication of Hollywood sterility. It is a sad commentary indeed which indicates that the forces for better pictures are gathering beyond studio walls; sad that within that false paradise of boy-meet-girl great minds are devising ways and means whereby they can alter the age-old for-mula with what is called "a new twist."

And the Artists . . .

THERE was a time when the screen artist—technician to star—was someone who hung around the corner of Sunset and Gower between calls. Came the day when the more political-minded of the Powers saw the need to raise sufficient funds to defeat the EPIC plan back in 1934. This is no occasion for raking up ancient slime, but that expropriation of a day's salary or whatever it was, gave birth to the Union and Guilds. Within four years the actors, writers and directors, as well as technicians, have formed some of the most powerful labor unions in the country. The artists themselves are taking an increasingly important role in raising the standards of the screen above a mentally subnormal level. Acting through the Guilds and Unions, through the Anti-Nazi League, through kindred organizations, they are expressing themselves, voicing a demand for a forceful and intelligent screen. Quite properly, it is beyond the province of these organizations to deal with improving pictures, but membership in them at least indicates that artists are aware of current issues and trends. The most powerful medium on earth is the screen. It is natural that artists should make attempts to improve the quality of their medium and their work. All the handwriting, including the dissolution of foreign markets, is there. How long can Belthazzar stare at the wall without acting?

FRANZ WAXMAN

Musical Scoring of

"Shining Hour"

"Christmas Carol"

"Young in Heart"



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